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AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT OF INTERVENTIONS PROVIDED TO AT-RISK, NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Noah. Though the work may be arduous and the journey long, never give up on anything that you believe in. Most importantly, never give up on yourself. You can be anything that your heart desires; it just takes hard work, extra effort, and patience along the way. I believe in you, and I appreciate you for always supporting me and never giving up on me while I completed the journey to my doctorate degree. I will always be there to provide love, guidance, and support to you on your journey throughout school and life. I love you.

ABSTRACT

In this mixed-methods study, the researcher set out to identify factors that affect the overall success of students during their first year of high school, thereby directly impacting the graduation rate. In my state when a student enters high school, they are assigned a 9GR (9th grade Graduation) code. This code is determined by looking at the year of the spring semester of the ninth-grade student's first year of high school, and this represents the year the student should graduate. When a student does not graduate during the year of their assigned 9GR code, it can have repercussions not only for the school's and district's state report card, but also for the student's long-term success.

Using outside data and research, I examined the difficulty of successfully completing coursework in ninth grade without proper interventions and support. The study investigated the interventions of progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans and whether these interventions assisted in motivating ninth-grade students toward success, keeping them on track for graduating on-time. By using both quantitative and qualitative methodology, students' overall averages and likelihood of promotion to 10th grade, as well as students overall attitudes toward high school and success were able to be measured. The study examines whether at-risk student's averages in their classes would increase as well as their likelihood to promote

to 10th grade at the end of their ninth grade year if progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans were implemented with each student. The same interventions were used to examine students' attitudes toward high school and their academic success. Data collected for research question one determined that these interventions had a positive impact on their class averages increasing their chances for promotion to 10th grade. However, data did not show a significant change in the majority of student's attitudes toward school due to these interventions.

Keywords: ninth graders, interventions, at-risk, progress monitoring, success, promotion, graduation rate.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SC SDE ..... South Carolina State Department of Education

EWIMS..... Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System

GTS ..... Graduation Tracking System

ASCA..... American School Counselor Association

FLEX ..... Flexible Learning Time

SCT..... Social Cognitive Theory

SCCT ..... Social Cognitive Career Theory

ACGR ..... Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

To some it might just be a piece of paper; to others it is their lifeline. In a family of doctors, it is just another piece of paper on the way to a medical degree, but for other families, it may be the first high school diploma. In the 1950's, 60's, and into the 70's and 80's, a high school diploma was not a necessity. Given the time, earning a high school diploma did not immediately confer success. There were options; particularly in the South, there were manufacturing plants, textile mills, furniture companies, and other places for employment with no diploma requirements. Today without a high school diploma, that success is almost impossible. Even enlisting in the military is increasingly more difficult without a high school diploma. That piece of paper is the difference between finding success or navigating an extremely difficult path ahead.

Some students never get the opportunity to walk across the stage and receive their diplomas. Many factors in a person's life and background can influence this outcome or decision. Often, proper interventions or support are the missing links that hinder an individual's success. As a student who also had little support from home, I can identify with my own students who struggle. As the first person in my immediate family to graduate with a bachelor's degree, my high school education was something that my family expected me to complete, but for which they provided little. For students who

feel alone, the likelihood of completing high school on time or even at all is certainly not a given.

During my first year as a school counselor, mentoring became extremely important and close to my heart. A student who was not on my caseload came to the guidance department extremely upset. Nobody could talk to her. She would not talk to her counselor, her administrator, or even her own mother. She was irate and yelling and screaming, so I decided I was going to try even if I failed. I brought her into my office, and she quickly let me know that she would not be talking to me about anything. She threatened to throw my office chair through the wall if I said another word; she was loudly spewing profanity. I never backed down and decided if she threw the chair, I would handle that then. She did not throw the chair, and she did deescalate when she saw I was not scared at all. She talked more and more when she saw I believed in her. Each week she talked more and more. She turned into "my student." Despite her lack of motivation, poor attendance, and longing to give up daily, she persevered throughout the year. We kept a countdown of the days she had left, and each week I would remind her that she could not quit now. Weeks turned into months and months turned into June, and she beamed when she glided across the stage in a coliseum full of spectators. She had made it.

The school of focus in this study, a rapidly growing high school in South Carolina, has experienced much change over the last ten years. In the 2008-2009 school year, the district had 9,431 students. It was projected that in the 2017-2018 school year there would be 14,842 students enrolled district wide. According to school data obtained from

PowerSchool, the actual enrollment during the 2017-2018 school year was 15,165 students. In ten years, the district had grown by an additional 5,734 students.

As students and families continue to move into this once rural, very small town, the population of students is changing. If educators continue to view education and strategies to assist students in the same ways we did ten years ago, very soon the district may begin to see a dramatic decrease in graduation rate. Because the district is high- performing, many stakeholders are unconcerned; however, if we do not begin meeting struggling students where they are and providing direct interventions, students will not graduate on time or at the current high rate. According to the South Carolina State Department of Education (SC SDE) school report card released in 2016, this rapidly growing high school's graduation rate was 95.2% but dropped the next year to 92.2%. The graduation rate began to rise again and was calculated at 94.2% in 2018 and 94.1% in 2019. While this was still significantly higher than the state's average graduation rate of 84.6%, if proper tracking and interventions are not put into place, it may begin to decline again.

Hardy (1989) defined at-risk students as "those who fall behind, whose school attendance is uneven, whose basic skills are limited**"** (p. 38). Focusing on at-risk students should be the district and school's top priority for the graduation rate to stay the same or increase. It is estimated that one in four students drops out of high school (Hickman & Heinrich, 2011 as cited in Hickman et al., 2017, p.45). Based on this statistic, if a freshmen class begins with 529 students, 132 students will not walk across the stage with their graduating class. Concentrating on the at-risk population in a high school

needs to be of utmost importance. Just last year, I had three students on my caseload alone who dropped out of school and did not earn a diploma. Drug use, societal influences, low socio-economic status, and apathy all led to their decisions to drop out of high school. In the case of these three students, they were supposed to obtain their GEDs, but when I followed up with their families, none of them had. Fall 2019 semester data in PowerSchool showed 14% of freshmen at Falcon High School (pseudonym) were failing a course needed to graduate. That may not sound alarming; however, if each of the six counselors employed in my school were to have a few students who do not graduate, we would be sending eighteen or more students per year into our community without the necessary tools to succeed and positively affect our community.

By investigating the best tools and programs to use with at-risk ninth-grade students, I hope to positively impact their achievement and thereby keep them on track for graduation. At any given time, a significant number of ninth graders are failing a class. At the end of the first twelve weeks of the 2019 school year**,** the data in PowerSchool indicated that freshmen were failing 105 classes; of these students, those who were failing multiple courses combined with attendance and/or behavior issues would be considered "at-risk." Of those 105 classes, 67 freshmen were failing at least one class, and 15 freshmen were failing at least two. Students who do not receive proper strategies and interventions will lose credit for failed courses, which can then impact their ability to promote and stay on track for graduation.

The problem of practice addressed in this study is that the lack of an appropriate support system for at-risk ninth graders can limit the likelihood of their graduating on

time or at all. This study set out to show that with the proper support system, ninth graders would be better able to navigate the high school curriculum and finish the year on track for graduation. Ninth-grade students considered at-risk were given interventions such as progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans to help them succeed. Even though this study was limited to ninth grade, the expected outcome was that students on track after interventions would be more likely to succeed as long as the support and interventions continued during subsequent years.

Background Literature

In high-performing suburban areas, one would not expect the graduation rate to be a statistic needing attention. However, given very rapid growth, the district in which I work is experiencing significant change; therefore, over time the graduation rate will continue to decline if proactive efforts to monitor students are not carried out. Based on school data from PowerSchool, at the study site each semester approximately 14% of freshman are failing a class needed to stay on track for graduation. If proper interventions are not in place to assist struggling students, they could become part of our dropout data. Research related to self-efficacy, social learning theory, and mentoring suggests that progress monitoring that includes goal setting, regular meetings and support from a consistent adult in the school, and teaching a specified curriculum for at-risk students can have a positive impact on students' academic success. Faria, Sorensen, Heppen, Bowdon, Taylor, and Eisner (2017) and Lessard and Fortin (2009) both acknowledge the importance of monitoring students and providing

interventions to increase their academic performance. Deci and Ryan (2012) provide additional support when it comes to building relationships with students. Bandura (1986), Yosef (2011) and Yunus and Ali (2008) are key researchers who provide important information surrounding self-efficacy, social learning theory, and mentoring.

Introducing progress monitoring beginning in the first year of high school has a positive effect on the graduation rate. In their study, Faria et al., (2017), who implemented a system called the Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System, show that early identification is important to get the student back on track and prevent dropping out. When compared with graduating peers, students who drop out of school are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, live in poverty, have poor health, and become involved in criminal activities (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Hayes, Nelson, Tabin, Pearson, & Worthy, 2002 in Faria et al., 2017, p. 1). This indicates that obtaining a diploma positively affects both the student and society.

Lessard and Fortin (2009) found that students indicated the reason they did not drop out of high school was the positive role school staff played in their lives. When students did not feel that they could depend on their parents, they could depend on other "significant" adults (p. 24). This shows the importance of establishing a positive rapport and solid interventions for at-risk students from the onset of ninth grade.

A number of studies have shown the importance of providing additional support to high school students through the implementation of tracking or monitoring systems. Faria et al. (2017) detailed the Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS) to identify students at risk of not graduating. The State Department of

Education for Montgomery, Alabama (2011), introduced the Graduation Tracking System (GTS) to determine students who needed interventions in the areas of attendance, behavior, and academic performance. By building a strong rapport with teachers, counselors, and administrators who can be trusted and regularly approached for help, students will be more likely to experience success. Having personal regard for students elicits another level of care in building relationships and shows them they are cared for and valued (Holland, 2015). In addition, Deci and Ryan (2012) discuss how relationships between teachers and students allow students to develop beliefs and values that mirror those of the adults, which leads to greater success in the academic realm. Lenz, Graner, and Adams (2003) state, "The first step in developing an effective communication system with students is to shift the goal from simply communicating to communicating to create an academic relationship" (pp. 70-71).

Shapley, Vicknair, and Sheehan (2004) in their study of at-risk ninth graders stated, "Guidance and counseling services for students in at-risk situations are limited in many high schools by counselor-to-student ratios that exceed recommended standards" (p. 3). The counselor to student ratio in South Carolina schools far exceeds the standards recommended by American School Counselor's Association (ASCA). While ASCA recommends a 250:1 ratio, from 2005-2015, the average ratio in South Carolina was 391:1. (American School Counselor Association, 2016, p. 47).

According to data obtained from PowerSchool, the average school counselor to student ratio at the school where this study was conducted was 333:1, emphasizing the

need to support this at-risk population. According to Hodges (1993), “Bigger is not always better; this is especially true when at-risk students are trying to survive school” (p. 1). Considering the sudden explosion in population in the area being studied, this especially rings true. The purpose of this study was to determine whether the interventions of progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans helped students stay on track for graduation. This study will allow the school to make certain it is providing all the necessary tools to help students earn their diplomas.

In this action research study, participants were underperforming ninth graders who met at least two of the three following criteria at the end of first semester: failing one or more classes; having one or more major behavior referrals impacting instruction (e.g., in- or out of-school suspension); the equivalent of three days of unexcused absences (i.e., three full days absent or twelve unexcused absences). Once students were identified, I met with them to review their current grades, attendance, and behavior and to set a measurable goal that could be attained in a two-week period.

I then met with students weekly to review the goal and progress; at the end of two weeks, if students had met their goal, we set a new goal or rewrote the current goal if it had not been met. Parents or guardians as well as teachers received copies of all goals set and notes on the plan of action. Students also attended FLEX sessions (a regularly scheduled time during the week used to meet a variety of student needs) once a week for six weeks to learn a specified curriculum that I developed for at-risk students. This action research study aimed to determine which if any of the intervention strategies worked best to keep students on track for graduation.

Theoretical Framework

Researching the graduation rate of high school students revealed several concepts as having profound effects. Bandura (1986), Yosef (2011), Yunus and Ali (2009), and Motlagh et al. (2011) provide data and information surrounding mentoring and interventions for students. Mentoring, intervention programs, and progress monitoring are all significant in turning the graduation rate around. Research indicates that this provides the framework for making a difference in the lives of students and the culture of the school. Many students need a supportive adult in their lives to be able to face the hardships or adversities that life presents. If they do not have support at home, it must come from the school. Therefore, placing intervention programs for at-risk students in schools is key.

In support of a mentoring relationship, self-efficacy provides foundational support for success in academics. Connecting to social cognitive theory (SCT) discussed by Albert Bandura (1986, 1997), self-efficacy is one of the five constructs that defines SCT. "The goal of SCT is to explain how people regulate their behavior through control and reinforcement to achieve goal-directed behavior that can be maintained over time" (LaMorte, 2016, para 2). When students practice self-efficacy, they are able to see the value in what they are setting out to accomplish. According to Bandura (1986, 1997), "Self-efficacy theory stressed that human action and success depend on [the depth of] interactions between one's personal thoughts and a given task" (as cited in Yosef, 2011, p.1). Without self-efficacy, students will possess negative thoughts and perceive given

tasks as demands, which threaten them, rather than challenges them (Yunus & Ali 2009; Bandura 1994 as cited in Yosef, 2011, p. 1).

This theory also supports students setting goals and using strategies to reach them. Research supports a strong relationship between self-efficacy and self-regulation. If students are taught self-efficacy, they will learn self-regulation as well. "Self-efficacy for self-regulated learning refers to the individual's beliefs on application of the self-regulation processes such as goal setting, self-monitoring, strategy use, and self-evaluation" (Bandura 2006 as cited in Motlagh, Amrai, Yazdani, Abderahim, & Souri, 2011, p. 766). Self-efficacy and SCT have been proven to support both a change in individuals and the way they conduct their lives and activities (Bandura & Locke, 2003 as cited in Motlagh, Amrai, Yazdani, Abderahim, & Souri, 2011, p. 766). Important to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory is also Zimmerman's (2008) contributions to the goal-setting theory. Drawing from research on goal-setting theory first established by Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, and Sears (1944), Zimmerman set out to identify 4 major ways students could better motivate themselves toward reaching their goals. In so doing, students are able to set themselves up for more academic and overall success.

Supporting goal setting, mentoring, and a specified curriculum, social learning theory "explains human behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences" (Kim, Jain, Westhoff, and Rezabek, 2008, p. 277). According to this theory, effective role models are used to support the learner in hopes that positive behaviors that are modeled will be repeated. This theory

emphasizes observational learning (Banduara, 1969; Deeming & Johsnon, 2009 as cited in Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2016) which occurs when the individual learns from observing. When positive adult figures in a school model good behavior, study skills, and acceptable student conduct, this may in turn cause students to reflect on their current lives and apply the learning. Building a foundation and setting positive trends will carry students through their high school years.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the action research study was to use progress monitoring to determine whether goal setting, small group sessions with specific lessons, and weekly academic intervention plans will have a positive effect on academic success and students' attitudes toward school. As for progress monitoring, it is important to pull data weekly to see what trends are developing where students are concerned. "Data systems should provide real-time data so that individual student performance can be continually monitored to allow interventions to be adjusted as needed" (Wilkins and Bost, p. 268). Through monitoring the same group of students weekly, I was able to find patterns and areas for focus. In communicating with these results and goals with the students, their teachers, parents, and administrators, this kept everyone on the same page concerning these data and the ability to help students reach their goals.

Research Questions

While research is available about interventions that include progress monitoring for at-risk learners, there does not seem to be much research on counselors conducting progress-monitoring for their students. As a high school counselor, I used my study to

work closely with a group of at-risk, struggling ninth graders and, if successful, to implement this protocol department-wide. In her research study, Pettey (2007), framed questions that are similar in scope to mine:

1. What data collection systems are currently being used to monitor student academic progress? (p. 15)
2. Are interventions more effective when an objective data collection system has been implemented? (p. 15)

Her study was helpful because Pettey used progress monitoring and academic interventions and measured the impact on student achievement. She formulated a data collection sheet for progress monitoring. While I already had one that I created when I was a progress- monitor, I tweaked it as part of my research study. Pettey's methodology appears to be only quantitative, but I used a mixed-methods study so that I could compare the statistical data to students' and teachers' perspectives.

I began looking solely at grades of my students two years ago as an indication of their performance found progress-monitoring had been somewhat successful. However, it became evident that pulling only the students who were failing did not help me identify all at-risk students who needed help and interventions. Therefore, for this study, I decided to base my group on students who fit two of these three categories: failing grades, poor attendance, or behavior referrals that resulted in a loss of instructional time.

Through my research study, I addressed the following questions:

1. Will participation in the interventions of progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improve struggling ninth-grade students' grades and success rates for promotion to 10th grade?
2. Will struggling ninth-grade students who participate in the interventions of progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans develop more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success?

Participants

In this mixed-methods action research study, I used PowerSchool and Educator Handbook data to pull students based on factors that placed students at risk for dropping out or not graduating on time. PowerSchool is the academic records system used in my school district to record student's grades, attendance, test scores, and other identifying information. Educator Handbook is the online behavioral recording system used in my district by teachers and staff to submit behavior referrals for students who have broken a school rule or policy. Using these programs, I screened all incoming ninth graders to find those who had at least two of the following: (1) failing grades in one or more classes after the conclusion of first semester; (2) the equivalent of three or more unexcused absences at the end of first semester (i.e., three full days absent or twelve unexcused absences); (3) one or more major behavior incidents resulting in the loss of

instruction during first semester. This study focused only on ninth graders new to this high-performing high school for the 2019-2020 school year; therefore, no repeaters from previous freshmen classes were included.

I used purposeful random sampling to identify ten participants. In purposeful random sampling, researchers use a process to identify a population of interest (in this case at-risk students) and develops a systematic way (in this case using the PowerSchool and Educator Handbook) of selecting cases without outside knowledge of how the results would appear (Cohen, 2006, para 1). I estimated that the number of students who would fall in the at-risk category for not graduating on time or dropping out to be around 50 students. Since the entire group would consist of too many students for me to closely monitor and analyze, I used a random name generator, "Name Picker Ninja," to select the twenty students. I started with the first ten, but if students did not turn in their permission slips for inclusion in the study, then I continued to move down the list until I had twenty participants. With this small number, I was able to provide personal data that delved into the reasons behind their struggles.

Positionality

According to the 2018 *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States* report, the adjusted cohort graduation rate for ninth-grade students—those who complete high school within four year of starting—is 84%. Even though this number has continued to steadily rise since collection of this data began in 2012-2013, it still indicates that 16% of the population is not earning a high school credential with their peers. Helping as many students as possible to earn their high school diplomas

was the fuel behind my research study. Therefore, I felt challenged to make a difference in the lives of my students and impact others as well.

I conducted the study as an outside researcher with the students who were not on my caseload. Since students were not on my caseload, I needed to be careful not to impede, but instead strengthen their relationships with their counselors. Since I am in a superior position over these students, it was important that I showed compassion and understanding to them. It was also important that I handled any misbehavior during group sessions very carefully, to protect the trust of the counselor/student relationship. Typically, counselors are not seen in a disciplinary role but as positive sources of guidance even in difficult situations; therefore, I was careful to handle any misbehavior in the least intrusive manner. In addition, I provided qualitative data by interviewing students to assess the background behind the decisions they made in their lives concerning their progress and graduation. In addition, I surveyed teachers to gain their perspectives about their students who were participants in the study. Student's perceptions of high school were also examined through the Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999) survey, and this allowed attitudes to be measured in terms of whether the interventions changed the students' perceptions or attitudes toward high school. During this time, sensitive information came to my attention. Students and families were made aware as part of the permission and consent form that all information would be confidential, unless they had an intent to harm themselves or someone else, or they reported abuse or neglect. Because it was also possible that sensitive topics could arise during the curriculum lesson when the entire group of

students was in the room, I had a conversation with students prior to the first lesson concerning group confidentiality.

To look at me today, no one would ever guess my background. One would never assume that I did not have much support growing up due to the circumstances of my life. A Caucasian female, my upbringing took place in a very small town with few resources and with my mother who had only a high school diploma and my father a technical/trade certificate. I went to school each day, but there was never a strong focus placed on education. My grandmother dropped out in ninth grade. My grandfather worked in the mill, and my other grandfather and grandmother worked in a plant. My father worked in a plant and my mother as a secretary. According to the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (2007), "For traditional-aged students, across ethnic and racial categories and regardless of SES, parents play the strongest role in the college choice and decision-making processes" (p. 39 as cited in King, 2012, p. 20). Research clearly shows that I was likely to follow their example. I refused. I broke the mold and escaped the stigma.

In my childhood, I lived in a town where few people had the opportunity to go to college. Data shows that in the 90's, when I graduated, only 33% of students over 25 in my hometown received a high school diploma or a GED, and a mere 5.93% obtained a bachelor's degree (Educational Attainment, www.censusscope.org). According to the National Center for Education Evaluation, "It is the relationships with adults and other students who support and guide the student while positively influencing them and

educating them about college, that will increase the rate of students who attend college" (as cited in King, 2012, p. 21).

My students who do not graduate from high school all have outside influences that distract them from their goals. Therefore, I must strive to be the positive force in their lives and help them to change their outlook. By providing mentorship as someone to whom they can connect and relate, by monitoring their graduation progress along the way, and by providing interventions when they need assistance, I can help positively not only to change the graduation rate, but also to change the lives of students. By working with students in my school, I was able to build trust and guide them more easily.

Being candid with my students and sharing some of my experiences that led me to be passionate about this topic as well as conducting this study has helped me build a rapport and appropriate positionality. The importance of building relationships with students so that they feel secure and can find trust has been proven regularly through research studies. Minihan (2009) suggests that when dealing with struggling learners, the following must be taken into account: "We all need to know how to interact positively and effectively with struggling students so they can feel safe and connected to their classrooms and schools" (p.57). Without students understanding my own difficulties and background, they may not be as receptive of my support and instead consider me an outside party who cannot help them. Cookson (2017) in his research found relationship-building to be key in increasing student engagement and academic achievement; he further indicated critical importance in relationship building since "less than half the students enrolling in public schools today are white. We are a

multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual society" (p. 3). Understanding others and building a school culture of positivity and trustworthiness becomes key to success. Understanding all students regardless of their background is an important part of strong relationships.

Research Design

Herr and Anderson (2015) remind that the goal of action research is to improve practice or develop individuals and make the knowledge gained through the results of the study transferrable to other settings. Conducting a mixed-methods action research study proved to be most beneficial considering my role as school counselor. Numerical data was important to show whether my research hypothesis was met, but data concerning student's thoughts and feeling surrounding high school was equally important. According to Efron and Ravid (2013), "Qualitative research is designed to study school situations and events as they unfold naturally" (p. 40). Meanwhile, "The goal of quantitative educational research is to produce an effective and efficient educational system designed to improve the academic achievements of all students" (p. 43). I wanted to allow the feelings and actions of students to be represented alongside the data to show this study did improve the academic achievement of students.

As part of my mixed-methods action research study, I planned to collect qualitative data by interviewing students to investigate their family backgrounds and feelings surrounding school and see whether that information could reveal reasons they are struggling significantly in the classroom. I planned to use open-ended questions to gather more detailed information from participants. Interviews were conducted at the

conclusion of the study to gain more insight into students' feelings and overall experience as participants in the study. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) remind, "The collection of data in research involves systematically gathering information and recording it in such a way that it can be preserved and analyzed by a single researcher or a team of researchers" (p. 180). I recorded students' responses to my questions through the Voice Memos application on my Iphone, and later transcribed the questions and answers using a computer and Microsoft Word document. I password protected the voice recordings on my phone as well as the document I transcribed so they could not be accessed by an outside party. In my transcription, I looked for themes that were present in student's responses and coded feelings and attitudes that were repeated throughout the interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Ninth graders were chosen for this study based on the benefit of early intervention in identifying at-risk factors and assisting students navigate through high school. Hajovsky and Reynolds (2019) discussed the importance of early identification, "Mitigating risk behaviors requires focus on prevention or intervention informed by a thorough understanding of mechanisms of individual differences in risk behavior during early to middle adolescence" (p. 284). Reinhard (1997) discussed a program in Detroit geared toward increasing the graduation rate and included specific information about ninth graders: "9th grade is a make-it-or-break-it school year, when many students lose interest or drop out altogether" (para 7). Carl, Richardson, Cheng, Kim, and Meyer (2014) find through their study that early intervention is key:

> "Waiting until the end of the first year of high school, or even the end of the first semester, to identify students as off track may be too late to effectively intervene to help these students, because some students drop out during the first year of high school; others are so far behind in accumulating credits (and significantly disengaged from school, as well) that it is difficult to get back on track (p.34).

I had no prior knowledge of this group of students, which reduced the risk of bias towards them. At the conclusion of first semester, I pulled the grades, attendance, and behavior reports to establish the group of students. Once the students had been selected, I waited to begin the group until three weeks into the semester, by which time students had become accustomed to the demands of their second-semester classes. I then worked closely with the selected group of students during the next six weeks. Another reason I thought it was most important to work with ninth graders was the opportunity to build a foundation and set trends that would carry them through their high school years. I determined that if the study was effective, I would commit to continuing this program each year with incoming freshmen.

To begin conducting this study, I sought permission from the parents of the students since they were all under the age of 18. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) indicate an application with the Internal Review Board (IRB) must be filed before the study starts; then students and their families must be informed about the study in writing and informed consent must be obtained before any data is collected (p. 178). Permission was necessary because students needed to be ensured they were being

protected from risk or harm. I sent home permission slips to each family that included details about the entire study and its intent (see Appendix A). Finally, I provided families with a copy of the progress monitoring forms that I used weekly (see Appendix B).

I used quantitative data to show each student's grades, behavior referrals, and days of school missed due to unexcused absences; and I tracked each of these categories weekly to show overall progress. I represented this data by using various tables, charts, and graphs to show the progression of student's grades, behavior referrals, and attendance over time. In addition, I tracked each student's progress and whether they met the goals we set during their progress monitoring conference every two weeks. A paper and electronic system were kept of each goal setting form, and the parents and teachers were notified of the initial creation as well as the bi-weekly updates.

Students who were part of my study were required to attend a FLEX session with me each Wednesday for thirty minutes. A curriculum of lessons geared toward at-risk students who were likely to drop out or not graduate high school on time would assist students. Six weeks of lessons were taught to students. I developed the content for each lesson and all activities. Lesson topics included motivation, time management, healthy relationships, monitoring grades, staying motivated during online learning, and self-care during online learning.

As for qualitative data, I conducted structured interviews with students to establish data on the background information concerning their lower performance. By using a structured format, I provided the same questions to all students (Seidman, 2012

as cited in Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 99). I spoke to students about the reasons they were struggling. I took handwritten notes and recorded the interviews, as students answered the questions, and used this information to show trends and why students were unsuccessful in their classes and for staying on track for graduation.

Finally, I administered a structured pre- and post-study survey that each student was asked to complete. I compared survey data to understand students' perspectives about their success in high school before and after the study. I used the survey results to validate my background literature and research findings.

I analyzed goal setting/progress monitoring sheets for each student. Exploring the data from the progress-monitoring sheet for both qualitative and quantitative analyses allowed me to better organize the results. For qualitative data, I used coding to determine trends in data. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), making memos in the margins, finding categories, and then developing codes and common themes is an important step (p. 213). As for quantitative analysis, actual student data was used to determine trends and draw conclusions. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) informed that statements, tables, and figures are necessary to show results (p. 215). I completed charts and graphs to show how often students met their goals. I also provided data to show whether being in the study group longer made it more likely students would meet their goals each week.

I included exit surveys at the end of each session so that students could rate their feelings using a Likert scale about the lesson and their progress in the semester. This helped provide additional quantitative data for my study. At the end of the six

weeks, not only did I provide charts and graphs to show the number of students whose grades improved over the study period, but I also gave each student a post-survey to analyze their attitudes toward high school and see whether these changed over the course of the study. I also interviewed each student at length with open-ended questions to gather more qualitative data about their thoughts and perceptions of the study and high school.

Because qualitative data can be more open to interpretation, I examined the data carefully to look for any misconceptions or problem areas. "You ensure the trustworthiness of your findings by searching the data for discrepancies and counterevidence that may refute your assertions or provide alternate interpretations. (Gibson & Brown, 2009 as in Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 183). By finding any evidence that counteracts what the study set out to prove, I was able to look further into the trends and reasons for these data to validate the study. To further validate the study and show trends, the researcher should cross check different sources and look for patterns (Hendricks, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985 as cited in Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 183). As for qualitative validity, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) establish that there are so many commentaries and types that it is hard to know which approaches to adopt; therefore, they recommend using at least three strategies. I used member-checking, triangulation, and had others examine the data to ensure validity. I checked the coded interviews with students who were included in the study for accuracy, triangulated data from interviews, exit surveys, and progress monitoring, and had another doctoral student in the program examine my data for accuracy.

While it would have been ideal to conduct this study for all four years until the time for graduation, this action research study timeframe did not lend itself to that extent of research. I was confident that by conducting the study through one semester, I would be able to make predictions of long-term success based on my study; however, in order to truly know whether the work of study was successful, the interventions would have to continue and students would have to be followed for four years. Recognizing the limitations of the timeframe, if the study indicates it is warranted, I hope to continue to monitor these students even after the research study is complete. It is my objective to establish a new standard for at-risk ninth graders at Falcon High School. By supporting these students on a regular basis with a prescribed program and curriculum, our school and district can continue to thrive even with rapid growth.

Significance of Study

The goal of this study was to further my own practice as a counselor by building on research that already exists concerning mentoring, interventions, and progress-monitoring. By conducting this action research study, not only did I review, analyze, and apply literature, but I was also able to see how these programs and initiatives directly impacted at-risk students. Teachers, other counselors, and administrators could benefit from reviewing the results of my study because they will be able to review how these programs benefited ninth graders by helping them stay on track during their first year of high school. In addition, they may be able to gain insights about the importance of forming strong relationships with students through mentoring and progress monitoring.

Limitations of the Study

Turner, Cardinal, and Burton (2017) discuss the benefit of conducting mixed-methods research: “Scholars conducting mixed methods research can offset some of the limitations inherent in a single-method study” (p. 252). However, even by conducting mixed-method research, there are still limitations to consider. Given the short time frame to be able to conduct this study, it is difficult to have results that show how the problem and intended solutions might evolve over time.

While I feel that having a larger sample size would have been more beneficial and provided stronger data, the time constraints and my job responsibilities limited my data collection to a small sample. Therefore, the results of this study may not be as strong as they could be for a larger study over extended time. Student absences and other obligations also got in the way of meeting regularly to progress monitor and provide mentoring services. Parents could choose to pull their student from the group at any time, causing the results of the data for that student to be incomplete. Since much of the data depended on student involvement and response, there is also a limitation to considering concerning student’s honesty in the interviews and exit surveys, as well as their involvement in progress monitoring and the weekly lessons.

During the collection of data for my study, the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools to close. At the point of school closure, I was four weeks into my data collection with my study group. There were still two weeks of data that needed to be collected, and for a period of time, it was uncertain whether schools would reopen. Consequently,

I waited to see if my study could resume as planned. However, once it was determined that schools would not reopen, I formulated a plan to continue data collection virtually, by email, and by phone.

Organization of the Dissertation

In the remainder of this dissertation, fuller discussion of scholarly literature will be presented to inform the reader as to why this study was both important and necessary to the field. In the subsequent chapter of this study, I describe my review of the literature that grounds this study by further researching mentoring, progress monitoring, academic interventions, at-risk students, graduation rate, and ninth-grade students. In addition, I will discuss social cognitive theory as well as self-efficacy theory to connect my study to the research that has already been conducted. Chapter three provides more details about the actual study and my decisions concerning the way I conducted the research, along with full descriptions of the interventions that I used to carry out the study. Chapter four describes in detail every aspect of the study and all the findings. Finally, chapter five provides my conclusions, an action plan for sharing and extending my research results, and my reflections on the process.

Definition of Terms

Graduation Rate- The percentage of students who complete high school within the allotment of four years. The year they enter high school (which is also referred to as their 9GR) determines whether they graduate on time with their original class. Students who do not graduate within the first four years of high school count against the graduation rate.

Interventions- Programs and resources that are provided to students to assist them.

Mentoring- A program that is designed to impact students by building a strong rapport and support system.

Progress Monitoring- Tracking data to show increases and declines in student performance.

At-Risk Students- Students who are identified by a set of factors that put them at a higher risk level than their same aged peers.

Small Group Sessions- Weekly lessons during FLEX with students in the study group where they are taught a specific curriculum designed by the researcher.

FLEX- Flexible learning time, occurring each day for 30 minutes where students get enrichment or remediation.

Academic Intervention Plans- A plan written and shared with parents, students, and teachers to keep the student on track for optimal academic performance.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ninth grade is a difficult year of transition and adjustment for most students. If schools have not implemented the proper support and resources to assist these students in successfully navigating the year, the effects can be detrimental. When a student is struggling academically, behaviorally, or otherwise and is not given proper interventions to help them find success, the likelihood of their being promoted is low. If ninth-grade students who are identified as at-risk do not receive interventions, they may be retained and fail to graduate on time or at all. Progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans were implemented as a part of this study to help students who are at-risk find success during their first year of high school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research study was to provide interventions to at-risk ninth graders to help them to remain on track for graduation at the end of their freshman year. The review of literature suggests a gap in resources concerning ninth-grade students and graduation rates. Many studies can be found that discuss eighth graders and potential signs and identifiers to monitor in high school. Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore, and de la Torre (2014) used data from the Chicago middle schools to report how the middle school years (grade 5-8) impact high school performance. McKee

and Caldarella (2016) established twelve indicators of middle school performance and its impact on high school graduation, with students who met six or more indicators tracked. Their study found that attendance, grade point average, and ACT math scores were the most significant middle school indicators for being at-risk in high school. Logan (2011) also conducted a study looking at middle school factors and their impact on success in high school, identifying factors such as years retained in middle school, discipline referrals, socioeconomic status, final math grades, CRCT math scores, and absences as indicators of students being found at-risk in high school. Even with these studies considered, the specific research and data surrounding ninth grade seems to be sparse. Additional studies are widely available discussing the overall graduation rate, with the *Building a Grad Nation* report being available from 2010-2018. This report provides comprehensive information each year, presenting both data and insight into which successes have been found and which challenges remain. DePaoli, Balfanz, and Atwell (2018) provide key updates in the 2018 *Building a Grad Nation* report as they give policy and practice recommendations to help the nation reach a 90% overall graduation rate. Again, even with the provision of this key research, more data is needed about how providing interventions specifically in ninth grade can positively affect the graduation rate.

Underlying Causes for Problem of Practice

Macallumore and Sparapani (2010) show why the ninth-grade population should be addressed in relation to retention and the graduation rate. “Nationwide, ninth graders have the lowest grade point average, the most missed classes, the majority of failing grades, and more misbehavior referrals than any other high school grade level” (Macallumore and Sparapani, 2010, p.60). This research suggests that ninth grade should be the target year for identifying at-risk students. With approximately 22% of freshman repeating the ninth grade each year, it is clearly important to focus on the freshman year (Macallumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 60). Waiting until junior or senior year to begin helping students attempt to reach the goal of graduation is far too late.

Research Questions

With an intent of supporting at-risk ninth graders, this mixed-methods study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Will participation in the interventions of progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improve struggling ninth-grade students’ grades and success rates for promotion to 10th grade?
2. Will struggling ninth-grade students who participate in the interventions of progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans develop more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success?

Organization and Purpose of Review of Literature

To best support this study, this chapter will present a review of literature which synthesizes information concerning ninth graders and interventions that can be used with them. In addition to validating the importance of the study, a theoretical framework has been provided to ground the topic in a way that allows the reader to understand its context. Research on the population of students who typically drop out of high school will be presented from both the state where the research study was conducted as well as from the national level. Interventions such as progress monitoring, mentoring, small group sessions, and academic, attendance, and/or behavioral intervention plans are discussed through scholarly articles, books, and other resources that reinforce the study and its claims.

A literature review is necessary to frame any research study. Efron and Ravid (2013) discuss how the review provides a synthesis of the research based on the topic. The research that I have reviewed provides the background of the study as well as other studies that relate to it. To review the most pertinent information to my topic, I researched various databases including Academic Search Complete, ERIC, JSTOR, and PsycInfo. I also reviewed several books to gain more understanding about the reason students drop out of high school. All the information provided in the articles and books allowed me to gather information to support my problem of practice.

The literature reviewed first shows the negative outcomes for at-risk students when interventions are not provided, followed by literature related to interventions and

outcomes when adequate support is provided to these learners. Next, the concern surrounding the graduation rate is addressed as it is important to understand the impact of at-risk students not promoting past ninth grade or not promoting on-time with the peers that entered high school at the same time (Alliance for Excellence Education, 2010; America's Promise Alliance, 2017; Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates, 1972-2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2018). This is followed by discussion of the theoretical framework that supports this study is outlined. Behaviorism, social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory, and self-efficacy theory are all discussed to show how the behaviors, imitation, and intrinsic motivation of students are all import to their ultimate success. Finally, specific data from studies that address the concerns and impact when students do not graduate, interventions provided to at-risk learners, and other monitoring and support systems are discussed to determine how to best support at-risk learners. The literature reviewed supports research question one of using interventions with at-risk learners in an effort to help them succeed academically. Research question two is also addressed in this review by outlining mentoring and relationship building practices to assist at-risk learners.

Background on High School Dropouts

Data pertaining to dropping out of high school is recorded by each school in each district throughout the United States. By recording, reviewing, and maintaining statistical data, schools can provide interventions to students, the end-goal being a continued decrease in the number of students who are leaving high school without a

diploma. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2010), 7,000 students drop out of school every day, which equates to more than 1 million per year. Stark and Noel (2015) report in the "Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2012" shows that the graduation rate has continued to improve over the years. In 1972, for instance, the event dropout rate was 6.1%; by 2012, it dropped to 3.4% (p. 5). It is important to note, however, that the rate started to decline before 1980, but then began to rise again between 1990 and 1995, reaching 5.7% before declining and leveling off between 2009 and 2012 (Stark and Noel, 2015, p. 5). This data suggests that if interventions and programming are discontinued because the graduation rate has been improving or remaining relatively steady, the dropout rate could increase again.

The term "event data" (also referred to as "annual dropout data") signifies, according to The Compendium Report from the U.S. Department of Education, trends across time; it specifically refers to students ages 15 to 24 (Stark & Noel, 2015). Included in this data are students who received a high school equivalency (HSE) credential or complete a high school diploma by the age of 24. Therefore, the data is not as significant to this study as the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR). The ACGR rate looks at data from a group of students who entered the school in ninth grade and completed high school in four years. Students who properly withdrew from the school to attend another high school are not included in these data. These graduation rate data are more important for the purposes of this study because they show ninth graders who finish high school on time. In the United States at the end of 2010-11 year, the

four-year ACGR for public high school students was 79%; in 2011-12 it was 80%. For 2010–11, the estimated national 4-year ACGR for public high school students was 79%; for 2011–12 it was 80%. This shows that four out of five students who began high school as ninth graders finish within four years (Stark and Noel, 2015). The data concerning students who enter ninth grade and finish high school on time are most significant for this study because they show the importance of keeping students on track toward graduation beginning in ninth grade through their anticipated graduation year, generally a four-year time frame.

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education (2018) the event dropout data for 2016 show that 4.8% of students aged 15-24 left high school without ever earning a diploma or HSE credential. The adjusted cohort graduation rate for 2015-2016 school year was 84%, which showed a continued increase over time. Specifically, in South Carolina, as compared to the national percentile, the rate was 83%. This shows that the state of South Carolina is hovering right around the national average (US Department of Education, 2018, p. 38-39). Continuing to examine ways to positively impact the graduation rate is necessary to avoid a decline and promote positive results. The data shown concerning dropouts prove the importance of implementing strategies for students to continue to reduce the dropout rates both nationwide and in South Carolina.

America's Promise Alliance (2017) reported the overall graduation rate in 2017 was 84.6%, up from 79% in 2011. However, the nation is still off pace to reach the 90%

goal that was set to be reached by 2020 (para 2). Finally, Amos (2017) indicated, "The results concerning the graduation rate show that the nation needs to accelerate efforts to assist low-income, Black and Latino, disabled, and ELL students" (para 3).

Theoretical Framework

As noted in Chapter 1, this study is situated within multiple frameworks that support the interventions provided to students. With social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999) as the larger framework, social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986) also are important to this study. The theories of behaviorism (Watson, 1914) and goal-setting (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, and Sears, 1944 and Zimmerman, 2008) also contributed to the framework of this study.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism, first developed by John B. Watson (1914), studies observable behavior or the responses of individuals to stimuli in their environment. Watson developed his views and ideals from associationism, functionalism, and Darwin's theory of evolution. When discussed in a more modern sense, behaviorism is a movement within psychology that treats behavior as a subject of study using observations as its only influence. According to Banciu (2012), "Behaviorists believed that the only chance for psychology to become a science was that its data be directly observable and objectively measured" (p.22). Moore (2013) further explains, "Behavior analysis is not but another form of behaviorism" (p. 682). In simple terms, behaviors can be observed in the public realm.

This theory relates to the current study surrounding the graduation rate because students must adapt and change even when their environment and circumstances are difficult to make necessary, positive changes in their lives. Ultimately, their behavior and response to the situations before them have a direct impact on their lives.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory was formed under the umbrella of behaviorism. Using social cognitive theory as the lens, Bandura (1999) made it clear that individuals are responsible for the outcomes in their life -- they do not simply sit back and observe while changes occur in the environment around them. According to Bandura (1999), "By regulating their own motivation and the activities they pursue, people produce the experiences that form the neurobiological substrate of symbolic, social, psychomotor and other skills" (p. 4). In simple form, Bandura was suggesting that not only do people observe behaviors and then imitate them, but they also think about imitating them before actually taking action. Even so, O'Kelley (2019) further explains that based on Bandura's theories, important learning occurs before action is taken and lessons are learned even if the behavior does not change. When it comes to adapting behavior, social cognitive theory indicates that goals play a very important role in self-regulation of behavior, and by setting goals individuals are able to better organize and guide their behavior in order to reach outcomes (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Bandura (2000) discusses the function of agency in terms of social cognitive theory, stipulating that

people have individual agency to perform independently in any given environment, as well as collective agency when they rely on others to achieve performance collectively through group efforts.

Social cognitive theory relates directly to the current study because students are being asked to change their future by being responsible for their experiences. Educators and other stakeholders have continued to study ways to increase the number of high school students earning a diploma. With roots in behaviorism, the graduation rate is connected most closely to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT).

As a response to SCT, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) was introduced. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) developed this theory out of Albert Bandura's SCT. Social cognitive career theory aims to understand the "three interlocking models of interest development, choice making, and performance and persistence in educational and vocation domains" (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, p. 79). Of the three interlocking models, model one and two or the interest and choice models, while they can be studied differently, the interest model is a built-in component for the choice model. With the third model, since self-efficacy beliefs are predictive of outcome expectations, then this accounts for the variations in interests. Ultimately, SCCT closely links to career development and shows how all of these models or factors affect vocational interests and career choice goals and actions as well as academic and career performance (Dickinson, 2007). Since the current study focuses on academics, student performance, and the future, SCCT relates directly to this study.

Related to social cognitive and social cognitive career theories, self-efficacy refers to "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Self-efficacy is what allows people to persist even when confronted with obstacles (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). Lessard and Fortin (2009) interviewed 60 individuals between the ages of 19-22 concerning their high school experiences and the reasons they chose to remain in high school. Among the reasons they chose to remain in high school, even under difficult circumstances, was a larger support system that surrounded them. "Beyond their ability to establish relationships, they also showed both self-efficacy and healthy self-esteem" (Lessard & Fortin, 2009, p. 24). They were noted as having a positive discourse and knowing they had the skills and drive to graduate. Even if they knew they could not count on anyone in their home or personal life, they knew they could depend on their network at school. Self-efficacy is the intrinsic motivator to reach a goal.

Goal-Setting Theory

Also important to this study is the theory of goal-setting. Lewin, Dembo Festinger, and Sears (1944) first introducted the importance of goal-setting as individuals set out to fulfill their own aspirations. Throughout the years other researchers studied these theorists and added to the body of literature. Zimmerman (2008) was instrumental in his contributions to the goal-setting theory; identifying 4 major ways that students could be motivated towards success. In this plan, he indicated

that individuals would be motivated toward choice and attention to tasks to reach the goal, higher levels of effort, persist over time, and have greater self-satisfaction of learning. When it comes to framing this study Zimmerman's work is importance as students are working toward enhancing their academic performance and ultimately their overall success.

Theory into Action

Theory has a major impact on how the issue of high school dropouts is handled. The proper application of theory to goal setting can positively impact the graduation rate. Parr and Bonitz (2015) studied Lent, Brown, and Hackett in an effort to apply their findings concerning social cognitive career theory to their research study. The goal of their study was to test a model predicting high school dropout rates in relation to student demographic background and school-related beliefs and behaviors. The results of their study involving 15,753 high school students' socioeconomic status, academic performance, parental involvement, and absenteeism showed that these were all significant factors affecting the high school dropout rate (Parr & Bonitz, 2015, p. 504). The data for the study were pulled from the National Education Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002 conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2004). They polled students, teachers, parents, and school administrators based on a variety of variables that related to school characteristics, student background, home life, educational outcomes, employment, and postsecondary education decisions. The first set of data was collected when students were in 10th grade, then two years later, then

two years after that. The sample was gathered from 752 public and private schools across the United States. In relation of self-efficacy, Parr and Bonitz (2015) assessed student's self-efficacy during the initial year of the study. In relation to English and math (which were the focused of the study), self-efficacy did not significantly predict later high school retention or success.

Even though behaviorism, social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory, and self-efficacy seem to be the most closely tied to the dropout rate, few studies can be found that directly examine these in connection to the dropout rate. In their study, Dooley and Schreckhise (2016) explore social cognitive theory and how it impacts learning and dropping out of high school. In relation to self-efficacy, Parjaes (1996) indicates, "Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy are more likely to set larger goals for themselves and develop strategies to acquire skills and knowledge (p. 562). In their study, Dooley and Schreckhise (2016) found that participation in the Youth Development Program (YDP) a part of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program is successful in retaining students, with only 5.5% of WIA students dropping out, compared to 8.6% of the comparison group dropping out of high school. Providing students with opportunities to increase their chance of success aligns with social cognitive theory. Dooley and Schreckhise (2016) found, "Successful programs contain elements that combine early intervention, instruction while counseling, tutoring, student engagement, and motivated learning. These are key components of intervention programs manifesting SCT" (p. 384).

Graduation Rate Over Time

Declining graduation rates are something that has plagued America for many years. Many national leaders have attempted to have a positive impact on the graduation rate; however, today the rate is still not where it should be according to research. In his book, *Dropping Out*, Rumberger (2012) notes that the dropout rate appears to be getting worse. Heckman and LaFontaine (2012) examined sources of data and then corrected the data for internal errors to find that in many cases the graduation rates were not only lower than they seemed, but also in many cases lower than depicted in federal government reports. Further, he indicated that they are lower than forty years ago and that disparities among racial and ethnic groups have not improved over the past 35 years.

Presidential Influence

Over the years, to increase the national graduation rate, Presidents including John F. Kennedy, George H.W. Bush, and Barack Obama have all implemented measures to increase the graduation rate. In 1963, Kennedy launched the "Summer Dropout Campaign" to increase awareness and help local school districts increase their graduation rates. In 1990, George H.W. Bush adopted six national educational goals for 2000. As part of these goals, he indicated that high school graduation rate should be 90% and the achievement gap for minority students would be eliminated by 2000. As is evidenced by Heckman and LaFontaine (2007), not much has changed even with these efforts in place. In 2010, the American Promise Alliance brought many leaders together

to continue exploring this problem. At that time President Obama said, “This is a problem we cannot afford to accept and we cannot afford to ignore…it is time for all of us to come together…to end America’s dropout crisis” (U.S. Office of the Press Secretary, 2010, para 14). As a part of this meeting, Grad Nation Campaign was launched whose goal was, again, a 90% graduation rate by 2020.

Grade Nation Campaign

The Grad Nation Campaign was officially launched in 2010 by President Barak Obama in an effort to put a system in place that would “[make] sure that we have the best-educated citizenry in the world” (U.S. Office of the Press Secretary, 2010, para 27). To bring together the stakeholders in the county, Obama set out to end the dropout crisis while preparing graduates for college and a 21st century career.

Since the launch of Grad Nation Campaign, improvements have been noticed. In 2016, it was reported by Education Secretary John King that a milestone had been reached: the American high school graduation rate had reached a new record high of just over 83% (Toppo, 2017). The report also found that “Black and Hispanic students made higher yearly gains than their white counterparts (1.4 and 0.7 percentage points respectively, as compared to 0.3 percentage point for white students, and 0.5 percentage point nationally) in 2017” (Civic Enterprises, 2019, para 10). Positive changes seemed to be occurring nationwide, but it does not seem likely that the goal of 90% will be reached by the end of 2020. According to the Grad Nation Campaign report (2018), there have been 2,800,000 additional high school graduates and the graduation rate

reached 84.6% (para 1). The nation is closer to achieving the goal of 90%, but the Grad Nation Campaign released this statement in 2018:

> To reach 90% we must close the gaps in the graduation rates of Black/African-American students, Hispanic/Latino students, English-language learners, low-income students and students with disabilities. The closer we get the harder it gets, so there is room for everyone to make a difference (para 6).

With the changes that have occurred concerning growth and enrollment at the school where this study is taking place, it is important that the graduation rate continues to be monitored and that the gaps continue to be closed for all students, including minority students.

By the Numbers

According to the U.S. Department of Education in its most recent Compendium Report (2018), Native Americans/Alaskan Natives are the most likely to dropout at 17.3%. African American students are next most-likely to drop out at 5.9%. Caucasian and Hispanic students are closely matched at 4.5 and 4.7 % respectively, and Asian students are the least likely to dropout at 3.6%. Male dropouts represent 5.4%, while females are at 4.1%. The national dropout rate when it comes to the lowest income indicator was 7.2 %, while 3.9 % were in the highest bracket of income. This suggests that socioeconomic status (SES) plays a significant role.

Also, according U.S. Department of Education's Compendium Report (2018), results pertaining to ethnicity are similar in the Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR). The ethnicity statistics remained similar with Native Americans/Alaskan Natives having the lowest percentage of graduates with a 72% rate and African Americans having the next least, at 76%. This was significantly different for Caucasian students with 88% and Hispanic students with 79% earning diplomas in four years. Asian/Pacific Islanders were still the highest at 91%.

This national data indicate that the groups of most concern are Native Americans/ Alaskan Natives and African Americans. Data were not available as to a breakdown of gender/SES for the ACGR data. In the Report on Student Dropout Rates (State Department of Education, 2018) the most recent data showed the 223,647 students enrolled, 5,351 dropped out of high school without earning a diploma. Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were still at the highest rate with 4.9% dropping out, and Asian/Pacific Islander were still at the lowest with 0.5 %. Major differences between the state of South Carolina as compared to national data were that dropout rates for African American students and Caucasian students were very close with percentages of 2.5 % and 2.3 % respectively. Hispanic students dropped out a rate of 3.1 %. Males dropped out at a rate of 2.8%, while females were at 1.9 % (State Department of Education, 2018).

Since around 7,000 students in America drop out of high school each day (Rumburger, 2011), further research must be conducted to find ways to support these

at-risk students. When it comes to dropping out of high school, there seems to be a direct link between being retained in ninth grade and subsequently dropping out of high school. Since this study aims to put interventions in place to support ninth graders at-risk for dropping out of high school based on selection criteria, these data are important to this study. Neild (2009) found that "approximately 30% of the nation's recent high school dropouts were never promoted beyond the ninth grade (p. 55). This number is significant and shows that interventions must be put in place for ninth graders and not after it is too late to impact this group of students. Leckrone and Griffith (2006) echoed this sentiment with their finding "that students who fall behind academically during the freshman year have very low odds of earning a high school diploma" (p.54).

Even though South Carolina data indicate no significant difference between African American and Caucasian dropout rates, there is a lot of research about retaining and matriculating African Americans or students of color. Bradley and Renzulli (2011) used data from the Educational Longitudinal Survey and found that for Black students, differences in SES explain a higher likelihood of dropping out of school as compared to White students. Barnes and Eadens (2014) set out to provide educators with more insight into how race and ethnicity plays a factor in the educational experiences of ninth-grade students. The study found that race did not seem to play a role in their perceptions of their teachers nor experience.

Evidence from this study suggests that neither race, gender, culture, nor teaching credentials played a major role in the student's perception of an

> effective teacher. Students of color identified the most effective teacher as one who was energetic, caring, well organized, and creative. (Barnes and Eadens, 2014, p. 36)

This indicates that students care most about a teacher and their relationship and ability to present engaging lessons.

In discussing race and ethnicity, Stearns and Glennie (2006) found that ninth-grade students have the highest dropout rates among African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, and that male students have higher dropout rates than females. They also sought to find out if dropouts differ by grade level and age. They did find that ninth graders and students aged 16 and younger are more likely to leave school due to disciplinary reasons, and older male students are more likely to drop out for employment. Bell (2010) in his research concerning black males found that 26% of participants dropped out of school owing to academic factors, such as the school work being too hard or not liking their teachers, while 73% dropped out due to medical needs, peer pressure, loss of focus, home problems, or hanging out with friends. The main finding of Bell's (2010) study was that Black males will continue to drop out at alarming rates unless schools build in strong social and cultural opportunities. Providing strong academic programs and relevant curriculum will not be enough to keep these students in school.

Ninth-grade Students

Since there is little research dealing specifically with ninth-grade students regarding retention and dropout rates, Bornsheuer et al., (2011) set out to conduct a study to add to the body of research. Transcripts at a southeast Texas high school were reviewed at the end of freshman year. Transcripts of freshmen who did not obtain the minimum of 5.5 credits to move forward with their class from ninth grade to 10th grade were reviewed by the research team. A total of 1,202 transcripts were analyzed. The results revealed a significant relationship between ninth grade retention and on-time graduation of students who were not promoted (Bornsheuer et al., 2011, p. 14). The study found that ninth-grade students who are retained have a lower likelihood of graduating within four years. Specifically, it was found that students retained in the ninth grade were six times less likely to graduate on time than ninth-grade students who were not retained.

Vera et al., (2016) evaluated the impact on the freshman dropout rate of a ninth-grade summer transition program at a large public high school. Surveys were given and interventions were used to provide more clarity of career goals which allowed students to be more successful and connected in earning a diploma with more gains in self-efficacy. Through their research study, Vera et. al., (2016) were able to identify significant gains in participants' sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy. Students were able to better understand their career goals, receive more information about how

to be a successful student, connected earning a diploma to their career goals, and felt more comfortable in school and with teachers.

Societal Impacts

Students who do not graduate from high school have a direct impact on society, costing taxpayers significant amounts of money. High school dropouts also come with a significant financial burden for taxpayers, with the average dropout costing the economy around $292,000 (Breslow, 2015, para 5). In local terms, that means that taxpayers in South Carolina will end up paying approximately $1.5 billion for just the 2016-17 high school dropouts. According to Breslow (2012), the same students are also more likely to be incarcerated; he found that dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24 are 63% more likely to be incarcerated. As evidenced by the numbers, interventions to assist this group of at-risk students are of utmost importance.

Background of Dropouts

When the reasons that students drop out are analyzed, key factors are seen again and again. Iacbini, Petiwala, & DeHart (2016) examined adverse childhood experiences in students repeating the ninth grade and their risk for dropping out. These students were between the ages of 15 and 17. The Aspire program was used to conduct the Life History Calendar (LHC) a visual tool that facilitates temporal recall of life events (Axinn, Pearce, & Ghimire, 1999; Belli, 1998 as cited in Iachini, Petiwala, and DeHart, 2016). The findings were that 11 of the 13 repeaters in his study experienced at least one adverse childhood experience, indicating that trauma in students' lives can play a

key role in dropping out of high school. "Trauma is a critical factor to consider in the design of these programs and, in particular, for early intervention programs that aim to support those students already identified as high risk for school dropout" (Iachini, Petiwala, and DeHart, 2016, p. 225).

In looking at other predictors of students dropping out, Ricard and Pelletier (2016) determined that lack of friendships and parental support for basic psychological needs were significant negative predictors, indicating that lack of key friendship and parental support from home in the student's life can lead to their dropping out of high school.

Among reasons students drop out of high school, socioeconomic status, low GPA, and behavioral issues were found to have significant impacts (Suh & Suh, 2007). Low GPA had the most significant impact of the three factors. Suh and Suh (2007) found that early intervention was the key because once students develop more than one of these risk factors their likelihood of dropping out increases. Hickman, Sabia, Heinrich, Nelson, Travis, & Veri (2017) also looked at the impact of GPA on high school freshmen dropping out. Hickman et al. also found that GPA is a powerful predictor of success: with every single unit increase in initial GPA, the graduation rate increased by 8%.

Feldman, Smith, and Waxman (2017) provide a comprehensive overview of why students leave high school and never return. In their book *Why We Drop Out*, they described narratives and interviews from what is known as the Washington Student Oral Histories Project. In 2012 to 2013, they interviewed 53 participants from ages 16 to 22

who had previously dropped out of school. The gender distribution of students represented was 62% male and 38% female.

The group was diverse in race and ethnicity, but Hispanics were underrepresented. Of the students interviewed, 25% were African American, 11% were Hispanic, 8% were either Native American or Asian populations, 5 % were multiracial or "other," and 43% were White. The researchers made sure to represent urban (45%), rural (27%), and suburban (28%) populations. The percent of students who reported coming from single-parent families was 70%, while 62% reported behavior issues, 53% were using drugs and/or alcohol, 34% were having mental health issues, and 23% had been kicked out or removed from their home environments.

Students participated in a semi-structured protocol, which meant that the interviewers could be more flexible in their questioning and ask follow-up questions when necessary. One key component of this study was that actual youth perspectives were researched and analyzed, whereas many studies on dropout report data do not investigate students' feelings and opinions on the topic (Feldman, Smith, & Waxman, 2017). Since youths' perspectives on dropping out are largely absent from the body of research, this book is important to this field. The overarching findings of the study were that students who dropped out identified a pattern of behavior that led to their walking out and never returning involving disinterest, early skipping, and serious truancy (Feldman et al.).

Feldman et al., (2017) found that behavior in school was one of the main reasons students began to disengage and become disinterested. Many participants in the study "perceived school as a conflict-filled environment where they might not be able to control themselves and where punishment was a certainty" (p. 22). One important point revealed through the study was that students felt that administration was "less interested in understanding their behavior and more interested in controlling it through punishment" (p. 79). Negative behaviors had a direct link to dropping out; participants reported that at some point when they were suspended or expelled and were required to leave the campus, they just never returned (Feldman et al., 2017).

Other Reasons Students Drop Out

Feldman et al., determined that students became defeated because they felt that once they earned the reputation of being poor students, they were forever stuck in that role (Feldman, Smith, and Waxman, 2017). Students also reported that at they felt that by a certain point, they had failed too many classes to continue. They began to feel hopeless about completing high school, and so gave up and dropped out.

Completing a high school diploma makes a student less likely to be reliant on social services or engage in negative behaviors, including crime (Catterall, 2001 as cited in Ehrenreich, Reeves, Corley, and Orpinas, 2012, p. 198). In one study, Ehrenrich et al., (2012) focused on the graduation rate or completion of high school in relation to measures of high and low aggression. The purpose of their study was to explore students' perceptions of their path to graduation by using an ecological framework. By

using focus groups, Ehrenrich et al. (2012) were able to determine challenges, influences, and motivations affecting students remaining in high school even when they were at high risk for dropping out. The focus groups were comprised of students in eleventh grade who had experienced high levels of aggression on the Problem Behaviors Frequency Scale from grades six through twelve. One highly aggressive student noted the need for "fast money" and said, "you thinking what you're doing, like selling drugs or something, is going to make more money than what you would make at a real job" (Ehrenrich et al., 2012, p. 203). Finding resources to help students see the long-term vision as opposed to the quick draw of current negative behaviors appears necessary.

Ritchotte and Graefe (2017) conducted a study with an estimated quarter of high functioning students who chose to leave school. The study focused on adults who were labeled "gifted" but did not complete high school; 14 students were included in the sample. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted that lasted from 45 to 60 minutes. The study indicated that students leave school and never return because they do not see improvement over time and therefore disengage (p. 276). Ultimately, Ritchotte and Graefe found that students were often not aware of the alternate paths available to them if they left high school. This study discusses the importance of informing students and realizing that a traditional school setting may not be appropriate for every student.

Interventions to Reduce Dropping Out

Feldman et al., (2017) provide several suggestions for helping students to stay in school and not drop out. They determined that insufficient skills and behaviors necessary for academic success, insufficient academic support, fixed mindsets that undermined motivation and effort, and negative perceptions of classroom and school climate were all reasons students left school and never returned. As a result, they suggest educators work to understand the story behind the behavior, build a caring school community that fosters a sense of belonging among students, and institute instructional approaches that support and engage struggling students. These three key points for helping students all correlate with the current study in that they focus on several concepts that will be addressed: behavior, a specific curriculum, and progress-monitoring to support struggling students. At the end of the day, making sure students feel cared for and proactively checking in on them helps them to stay in school and not suddenly drop out (Feldman et al., 2017).

By using an interpretive qualitative design, Ehrenrich et al., (2012) were able to focus on "lived experiences" of the students and understand the meaning behind their socialization, world, and experiences. The study found at that school psychologists can engage students through cognitive behavioral methods to help students set realistic goals and manage stress. As supported by previous research, the study found ninth grade to be a major predictor of academic success. The study suggests that adults, coaches, and other positive team members should be a part of the student's network.

Mentoring

When it comes to providing interventions for students at risk of dropping out, mentoring has proven to be effective in keeping students in school. Somers, Wang, and Piliawsky (2016) evaluated the effectiveness of a combined tutoring and mentoring intervention that aimed to improve academic achievement and intentions of urban, low-income, African American youth. The goal of the study was to improve behaviors and attitudes that could increase the graduation rate among these at-risk youth. Of the 118 ninth graders who participated in the study, the experimental group demonstrated an increase in GPA after their participation in the program. The comparison group on the other hand experienced a decrease in GPA, indicating that providing mentoring and tutoring services to students had a positive impact on their high school experience (Somers et al., 2016).

While most mentors are volunteers, there are some programs which use paid mentors. Lakind, Eddy, and Zell (2014) looked only at the role of paid professional mentors for serving at-risk youth. The mentors who participated in this study indicated that focusing on the individual child and working with the youth over a long-term period to develop deep relationships are key.

In a quasi-experimental design, Mac Iver, Sheldon, Naeger, and Clark (2017) examined the impact of mentoring for low-income and minority middle and high school students over the course of three years throughout five districts. Trained mentors met with students once a week for two hours over a two year period. The mentoring was

expected to positively impact attendance, behavior, and grades. According to Creswell (2018), an experimental design "systematically manipulates one or more variables in order to evaluate how this manipulation impacts an outcome (or outcomes) of interest" (p. 147). It was determined through student responses to experimental surveys, that there was a positive impact through the mentoring program. McIver et al., believed that the mentoring needed to occur over an even longer period to see an impact in the data.

Comprehensive Guidance Curriculum

As for other interventions that could be provided to students at risk for dropping out, a counselor-led, comprehensive, developmental guidance approach with ninth-grade students has proven to have a significant effect. Ultimately "counselor-led, developmental guidance units presented in ninth-grade classrooms have the potential to improve students' expressed behavior and general school attitudes, while addressing their developmental needs" (Schlossberg, Morris, & Lieberman, 2001, para 48).

School attendance has a significant impact on students who decide to drop out. Students who miss school often receive in-office referrals and in-school or out-of-school suspension and are at higher risk for dropping out. In Hooever and Cozzens' (2016) study, the chi-square test of independence indicated that the number of days a student is available for instruction significantly correlated to the likelihood of a student's then graduating. They also found in another chi-square test that office referrals significantly

correlate to graduation rates. Investigating out-of-school suspensions among ninth graders.

McCallumore and Sparapani (2010), sought to show disparities in school suspension and how it relates to the high school graduation and post-secondary attainment gaps. The data from their study showed that one in four students are suspended in 9th grade. These suspensions had a negative impact on the students' educational success. Each suspension in ninth grade lowered the odds that student would graduate from high school and ultimately enroll in college. McCallumore and Sparpani (2010) found that being suspended just one time in ninth grade resulted in a two-fold increase in the risk of dropping out.

Involvement in social activities and extracurricular activities also has a strong correlation to remaining in high school. Frostad, Pijl, and Mjaavatn (2015) looked as social participation as a predictor of students' intention to leave school early. They found that lack of teacher support and loneliness in the school context were the strongest predictors for dropping out of school. Surprisingly, Frostad et al., found that peer acceptance and friendship have the least impact. Loneliness was proved within the study to have a direct impact on students' feelings. Also, in reference to social or extracurricular activity, Neely and Vaquera (2017) examined social bond theory and extracurricular engagement to see whether there was a link to dropping out. Their findings "support the study's core hypotheses, suggesting that extracurricular participation is associated with significant reductions in the odds of high school dropout,

even after controlling for known correlates of dropout and potential selection bias factors" (Neely & Vanquera, 2017, p. 1053). They also identified that African Americans who participate in both athletic and academic/fine art activities are less likely to drop out.

Interventions for At-Risk Students

Faria et al., (2017) examined the impact of the Early Warning Intervention and Monitoring System (EWIMS), which is a systematic approach to the early identification of and intervention with students at risk of not graduating from high school on time. Of the 73 schools included, all either implemented the new EWIMS system or continued with their current practices. After conducting the study for one year, Faria et al., (2017) found that EWIMS reduced chronic absence and course failure but did not reduce the percentage of students with low grade point averages or suspensions. This study is important because it provides evidence that EWIMS can potentially reduce absences and failures, which could in turn positively impact the graduation rate. While the EWIMS program will not be used as a part of the current study, there are clear indications that supporting students early can have a positive impact on their attendance and grades.

Mac Iver, Stein, Davis, Balfanz, and Fox (2019) presented research about providing an intervention to ninth grade students in hopes of increasing their attendance and course passing. This study was conducted in 41 high schools in one state where the graduation rate was under 75%. By hiring a half-time staff member to implement the Early Warning Intervention (EWI) team model with ninth-grade students.

The EWI team was comprised of teachers, student support-services personnel, and others who analyze student data and then provide interventions to struggling students. Monitoring early warning indicators among these students allowed timely interventions to be provided to these learners. This study found that there was a positive impact on student attendance; however, there was no evidence that this increased course passing rates.

Irfan Arif and Mirza (2017) researched the impact of providing interventions to at-risk learners in a high school setting. They developed a resilience building module for teachers and a risk identification survey to assess individual risk and protective factors. The module and survey were used to identify and then support at-risk learners. They then provided specific interventions, including a form for teachers to track academic performance and attendance, collection of demographic data for each student to identify their background and factors, a questionnaire for at-risk learners, a Resilience Assessment Scale (RAS), and a resilience module. It was important for the setting of this study to provide interventions to minimize the risk of students dropping out of high school. The study found there was a significant difference in the reporting of students concerning their classroom environment and they also achieved high resiliency scores on the post-test. The interventions provided to these at-risk students did help them to find more success in the classroom.

Summary

Behaviorism, social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory, and self-efficacy were all thoroughly researched to provide a framework for this study. All of these theories informed student choices and school environment and helped to show the importance of making good decisions and staying in school. Through a review of many studies surrounding the graduation rate, it is evident that a continued effort must be made to see a positive impact on the rate of students graduating from high school each year. Many different intervention systems, graduation tracking programs, and other means have been implemented to positively impact the lives of students so that they remain in high school. In all the research reviewed it was evident that there is a gap in literature specifically related to ninth graders, which is why ninth graders were chosen for the current study. While it is easy to find general data about the graduation rate, it is more difficult to find literature concerning specific interventions designed to keep ninth-grade students on track for graduation. Therefore, this study will aim to add to the body of literature concerning ninth graders and interventions to keep them on track to graduate.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this mixed-methods action research study was to examine and determine which interventions for at-risk ninth graders provide the best support when it comes to their success and finishing ninth grade on track for graduation. Neild (2009) suggests that if students do not successfully complete ninth grade with their same-aged peers, the likelihood of these at-risk students staying on track for graduation decreases. This indicates that students who earn fewer credits than are needed to be promoted in ninth grade are at an elevated risk for dropping out. Sharing further data, Neild (2009) informs that "approximately one-third of the nation's recent high school dropouts never were promoted beyond ninth grade" (p. 55). This is a nationwide problem that needs attention, and educators need proven strategies to use for retaining their students.

There have been numerous action research studies conducted with eighth-grade students approaching high school and who are at risk for dropping out of high school Phelan, 1992; McKee and Caldarella, 2015; & Balfanz, Herzog, and Iver,2007). However, there is a dearth of studies focused on first-time ninth graders, which is the reason they have been targeted for this study. The current study aimed to reach this group of at-risk students before they considered dropping out. While studies that focus on eighth graders identify risk factors for struggling in high school and potentially being at-risk for dropping out, my study added to the body of research because it analyzed the

effectiveness of certain interventions provided to ninth-grade students in helping them navigate through freshman year successfully toward next-grade promotion..

In my role as a guidance counselor, I often attempt to rescue students after they have already decided they want to drop out. Many counselors are in a deep cycle of mainly focusing on seniors who may not graduate if they do not get all of their necessary requirements; however, providing interventions to students in their first year of high school is important in order to break the cycle of counselors fearing that it may be too late to make an impact.

While ninth-grade academies and a push to provide additional support for ninth-graders do exist, there seems to be a gap in the literature when it comes to providing specific strategies to at-risk ninth graders to keep them on track for graduation with their same-aged peers. A database search quickly identified many sources on ninth grade academies and their benefits. Somes and Garcia (2016), Legters, Parise, and Rappaport (2013), Starke (2016), and Osler (2012) all have studies on the effects of ninth-grade academies; however it is more difficult to find studies surrounding ninth graders and interventions to impact the graduation rate over time. This shows why it is necessary to provide the support for at-risk ninth-grade students that will be outlined in the rest of this chapter.

To conduct an action research study that would yield results to best determine whether the interventions were effective, a mixed-methods study was undertaken. Quantitative research was used to show the effectiveness of the research based on numerical facts concerning student's grades, attendance, and/or behavior. In addition,

qualitative research provided insight into the students' feelings and thoughts about high school in general and the impact of the interventions. In addition, teacher perceptions were collected and analyzed to provide further quantitative and qualitative data. I felt that numerical data alone would not provide enough support and found it necessary to survey students and teachers to find out how the study personally impacted their school experience and lives. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2018), "The participants are involved because the researchers need to understand the detailed nuances of the problem or need the participants' help to implement the research findings that will impact people or communities" (p. 11). By more thoroughly examining and understanding students in this mixed-methods study, I was able to more accurately prove how this study can be used by other educators to impact their ninth-grade students.

In Chapter 3, the research questions and the hypothesis that led the study are discussed in detail. Confidentiality was maintained in terms of participants, but characteristics and other identifying factors are discussed concerning students in this study. The chapter also reflects the position that I brought to the study as a school counselor, as well as my personal background that impacted the study. Data collection and analysis are discussed in detail, including surveys, forms, and other means of collecting data, with further discussion to follow in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 closes with discussion of the validity and reliability regarding the measures taken to support the study and ethical concerns and considerations.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In this mixed-methods study, the following research questions were explored.

1. Will participation in progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improve struggling ninth-grade students' grades and success rates for promotion to 10th grade?
2. Will struggling ninth-grade students who participate in progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans develop more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success?

The researcher hypothesizes the following based on the research study purpose: if students participate in progress monitoring sessions, small group sessions, and have academic intervention plans, their likelihood of being on track for graduation at the end of the freshman year will increase due to relationship building and the extra support provided to them. While this particular study only looks at promotion rates at the end of ninth grade, the idea is that if students can successfully promote at the end of their ninth grade year, then they can continue with positive trends toward on-time high school graduation.

Participants

Being a counselor in a rapidly growing district has brought about many concerns because the data shows there are changes occurring in our student population. As determined the district's PowerSchool data, it was predicted that by the 2018-2019 school year, there would be 14,842 students. As of the 2019-2020 school year, we had 18,000 students enrolled. Since our district is very high-achieving and affluent, it is often

assumed that all students will rise to any challenge placed in their paths. When the test scores in our school are compared to those in the state, it is always clear that our students outperform those in many surrounding districts. According to data from the South Carolina State Department of Education, End of Course Examination Program (EOCEP) results show that our students perform higher than the state averages as indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 3.1 *EOCEP Test Percentages*

EOCEP TEST	STATE MEAN	SCHOOL MEAN
ALGEBRA I	68.3	**73.6**
BIOLOGY I	68.8	**81.9**
ENGLISH I	73.5	**77.0**
US HISTORY	69.0	**76.9**

Similarly, when it comes to national tests such as the American College Test (ACT), the state average composite score in 2017 was 17.7 while our school's was 20.3. In 2018 the average composite score was 17.9 while our school's was 21.2. Our district is often considered affluent when compared to surrounding districts in the state because the median household income and poverty indicator are much lower than the state percentages. The US Census Report spanning 2014-2018 indicated that the median household income of people living in the study area was 81,401 as compared to the state average of 51,015. In addition, the report showed that 8.25% of local people were living in poverty as compared to 15.3% poverty indicated for the entire state.

However, the school where I work is the only school in the district with students from two of the most financially strained communities in our town. Students attend our school from one community that accommodates 252 mobile homes. According to local real estate numbers, an average house in the town sells for $360,510; however, a home in this mobile home community is currently selling for $99,587. All of our students living in the mobile home community are living in poverty. The other impoverished area zoned for our school has home averages at $53,700, which is 85.10% less expensive than the cost of the average home in our town. In addition, two major apartment complexes have been built in our school zone within the last five years.

Another area of concern is our transient population and how we address the negative factors that can arise as result. Since we border a major city, this brings a very transient population to our school as well. According to data obtained from PowerSchool, 192 students withdrew to attend another school during the 2019-2020 school year. This transient population represents approximately 10% of our school population. Therefore, it is important that we are supporting transient students who often fall in the at-risk category.

The participants of this study are first-time ninth-grade students who failed at least one academic course in the first semester of ninth grade, have incurred the equivalent of three days of unexcused absences during first semester, and/or have at least one major behavior referral during first semester that resulted in the loss of instructional time. I used purposeful sampling to select the participants in this study.

According to Cresswell and Plano Clark (2011), purposeful sampling involves conscious selection of participants, which can be groups or individuals who meet study criteria. Even though I used specific criteria to select these students, it was also important to include random sampling as well to avoid bias. Therefore, once I used purposeful sampling to pull individuals based on the specific criteria, I used a random selector tool to pull twenty students from the larger group and then continued to move down the list of students until I had received permission from ten students.

In my role as lead school counselor, I have extensive knowledge of PowerSchool and the ability to pull many reports from the system. Prior to receiving approval from the IRB board, I was able to obtain some of the data that is contained in this study because it is a part of my day-to-day job. However, I did not begin conducting any parts of the actual study until I received approval from the University of South Carolina Institutional Review Board (IRB) and permission slips had been returned. Prior to beginning the study, I carried out my weekly tasks of conducting a routine search in PowerSchool and Educator Handbook to identify struggling students. I knew that some students would qualify in multiple categories since many students who are at-risk have low grades, attendance, and major behavior incidents. From the collected data, the group for the study was randomly selected. To be certain I had enough participants, I selected more students than I planned to include in the group because some parents declined to sign permission slips. Since all students were minors, parents were required to agree to their child's participation in the study.

Bornsheuer et al. (2011) found that students retained in the ninth grade were six times less likely to graduate on time. Therefore, I set out to determine the group of students who would be included in the study to prevent them from falling behind and being at-risk for not graduating on time. I accessed data from PowerSchool at the conclusion of semester one of the 2019-2020 school year. Based on semester one data, I was able to sort by ninth-grade students, exclude any students whose 9GR (the code used to determine what year they should graduate from high school) was not 20, and then pull the comprehensive list of students who were first-time ninth graders. From this list, I used a percent grade report in PowerSchool to find students who had failed at least one course during the first semester by searching for students who had final grades between a 0 and 59. Based on this report, 53 first-time ninth-grade students were identified as having failed at least one course. Next, I searched attendance data in PowerSchool using the unexcused absence report for first-time ninth graders. Based on the block schedule in high school, students may be absent from one block while being present in others. Students who had missed the equivalent of three unexcused days from school during first semester were included; therefore, students who were included had a cumulative total of at least 12 unexcused absences during first semester.

Group Selection

From the 33 students who met two of the three criteria, I used Name Picker Ninja, a random selector tool created by Vogel (2020, to choose the first 20 students that populated, keeping them ordered on a document. I invited the first 10 students and awaited permission slips back from parents, but did not receive permission slips back

from four; therefore, I continued to move down the list until I had a total of 10 students in the group.

Table 2 shows how students qualified for inclusion in the group. Only two students qualified in all three categories and the other eight students met at least two of the three criteria. A significant trend to note based on the data is that all students in the group had failed at least one class first semester. This could indicate that while the other two factors of attendance and behavior can certainly contribute to making students be at-risk, having failed at least one course in the first semester is a major indicator.

Table 3.2 *Qualifying Data by Student*

Student	Failed At Least One Course 1st Semester	Had At Least Three Unexcused Absences	Had At Least One Behavior Referral That Resulted in Loss of Instruction
Student A	X	X	
Student B	X	X	
Student C	X		X
Student D	X	X	
Student E	X	X	
Student F	X		X
Student G	X	X	X
Student H	withdrawn	from	study
Student I	X	X	X
Student J	X	X	

Once I received the signed permission slips from ten students, I began to schedule weekly individual meetings with students as well as one group meeting per week. Parents of students were informed of the expectations of the group in the consent form they signed and as outlined below (see Appendix A).

- Students participated in a group session that I led on Wednesdays during FLEX to learn strategies to assist in their high school performance.
- Students met with me one-on-one for counseling sessions to set a bi-weekly goal through progress monitoring.
- Students completed bi-weekly goal-setting forms that were used to help facilitate the one-on-one meetings.
- At the beginning and end of the study, students completed a 15-question survey on Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999) (see Appendix D).
- Students participated in one interview that was audio-recorded at the end of the study.

Student H did withdraw from the study after week four since he withdrew from our campus to attend another school; therefore, his data is not included in the study. All data that was recorded has been removed from the charts, figures, and discussion.

Positionality

As a high school counselor, I am passionate about the success of students when it comes to meeting the goal of graduating high school. Upon being given the opportunity to conduct an action research study, I knew that my study had to be based around this national problem that I often encounter with my students. While the graduation rate in our school and district is still considered high (see Table 3.3), it became apparent that if proper interventions were not added for at-risk ninth graders, the graduation rate would decrease over time as a result.

Table 3.3 *School Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rate*

	2016	***2017***	***2018***	***2019***
School	95.2	92.2	94.2	94.1
District	94.0	94.1	94.4	95.4
State	82.6	84.6	81.0	81.1

In my role as a counselor, I work specifically with tenth-, eleventh-, and twelfth-grade students. Even though we do not have a ninth-grade academy at our school, we have two counselors in our school who have a lesser caseload and work specifically with our ninth-grade students. Even so, our ninth-grade counselors do not run any type of program or have specific supports in place for our at-risk ninth-grade population. These at-risk students are only seen if they self-report to guidance with a concern or are referred by a teacher or administrator. I have seen a need to address this problem based on the number of ninth-grade repeaters we have each school year. If these students can successfully finish ninth grade and be promoted to tenth grade, their likelihood for success automatically increases.

As an outsider researcher, I was able to work with this group of students with fewer biases since I did not know them on a personal level and had never worked with them before. Gair (2012) states that when it comes to insider/outsider researchers, the terms can be "understood to mean the degree to which a researcher is located either within or outside a group being researched" (p. 137). In addition, Griffith (1998) adds outsider researchers do not have a close or personal knowledge of the group being

studied before they begin the study. Based on this information, the term *outsider researcher* is accurate to describe my positionality since prior to this study being conducted, I had never met the students included.

An important consideration when it comes to my positionality in terms of this study is the lack of support I had during my own high school experience. I can relate to many of the risk factors that students like the ones included in my study may face. While it was just assumed that I would graduate from high school, I did not have the proper support system in place. Due to my parent's divorce and the need to live with my grandparents, my freshman year was negatively impacted. Being candid and helping students understand the background I brought to this study was important in helping them trust me and allowing me to help them reach their goals.

Data Collection

Prior to collecting data for this study, I gained approval from the University of South Carolina IRB. To keep the group small and more manageable, I invited 10 students to the group, first randomly selecting 20 students who met all of the criteria and moving down the list until I had ten students whose parents had granted permission (see Appendix A). I consulted with my principal about conducting the study on campus and received permission to pull students once a week during their flexible learning time (FLEX) to teach the curriculum lessons. When I met with the students one-on-one, I did so during an elective course.

To begin collecting data for my study, I obtained the first semester grades, attendance, and behavior incidents for each student participating in the research study

from PowerSchool. In addition, I ran an attendance report each Monday at 8:30 a.m. using the unexcused absence report in PowerSchool. Finally, I logged into Educator Handbook to pull the behavior report for each student by searching their names individually to determine if any behavior reports had been recorded for first semester. I stored the grades, attendance, and behavior data electronically on the Excel spreadsheet I created and was password protected.

I made sure to pull the data at 8:30 a.m. each Monday to obtain the grades, behavior, and attendance data each week to be consistent. Even if a student did not meet all three criteria for inclusion in the group, I still established baseline data to track all the variables that were used to identify at-risk students in this case.

Each student had a specific day and time to meet with me each week for their individual session of progress monitoring and goal setting, which were both interventions administered to students. Through meeting with students, I was able to monitor their progress each week and assess their averages in each class. These meetings were held on Mondays and Tuesdays prior to the group meeting on Wednesday. If students were absent, I tried to make-up their individual session prior to the group meeting on Wednesday afternoon. While the individual session did not have to be completed prior to the group meeting, in order to keep students on track, it was the most logical.

The individual meetings lasted approximately 30 minutes; however, at times they were longer depending on the discussion that occurred as a result of the dialogue. During these meetings, I took field notes so that there would be a record of

conversations for later analysis to obtain meaning and perspective. I typed up these filed notes at the end of each week of individual meetings, so that I could begin to look for patterns to guide my study and work with the group. According to Creswell (2018), "A qualitative observation is when the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site" (p. 186). Creswell (2018) also suggests that these observations should be open-ended so that the participants are able to freely speak about their views. All meetings were held in my office.

In the beginning, I found it more difficult to make sure students reported on time. They were given a pass in advance, so they knew what time and day to come. I continued to provide passes each week. During the first two weeks, I called into classrooms to get students for their session; however, I noticed by week three students were reporting on their own for their sessions. Data for the week was pulled from PowerSchool and Educator Handbook on each Monday morning at 8:30 a.m. Based on the data from PowerSchool and Educator Handbook, week one provided baseline data for each student participating in the group.

Unexpected and significant changes impacted this study when the Coronavirus pandemic closed schools suddenly; consequently, Table 3.4 presents each data collection tool I was planning to use and how the timeline was disrupted due to COVID-19. The table provides the tool, intention for data collection, the original timespan, and actual timespan. This will help to better understand the occurrence of the pandemic in relation to my study.

Table 3.4 *Data Collection Tools Timeline*

Data Collection Tool	Intention of Tool	Original Timespan	Actual Timespan
Recording of Grades, from PowerSchool	To show progress monitoring over time to answer research question one.	6 weeks	4 weeks with final grades being recorded at the conclusion of second semester
Pre- and Post-Survey Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999)	To measure student's attitudes toward school before and after the study to answer research question two.	Week 1 & Week 6	Week 1 and at the conclusion of second semester
Goal-Setting Checklist	To gauge what actions students were already doing and which ones students would improve over time. This assisted with answering research question one, as the hope was it would help student's to be more motivated toward actions to improve their averages.	Weeks 1, 3, & 5	Weeks 1 and 3 (5 could not be completed as we were no longer in school and questions were based on being in school)
Goal-Setting Forms	To help students reach their goals surrounding academic performance and assist in answering research question one.	Weeks 1-6	Week 1, 2, 3, and 4. Goal-setting forms were not continued after school closure since many portions on the form related to student's being in school.
Exit Surveys	To gauge if the group sessions were helping students and what other information they needed in the future concerning the content. Meant to be a supplemental tool to aid in understanding.	Weeks 1-6	Weeks 1-6, but it is important to note that weeks 5 and 6 are not included in the data due to the low response from students due to being at home and many without a computer.

Student Interviews	To gain information about student's attitudes toward school and assist in answering research question two.	End of the study	End of the study
Teacher Surveys	Not analyzed as data, but used to supplement my understanding of students' attitudes toward school in relation to research question two.	Not originally planned as a part of the study but added due to there being a possibility of a low response from students on interviews.	End of the study

As seen in Table 3.4, many original plans for the study had to be adjusted due to COVID-19 and the closure of schools. Data collection tools were adjusted in an effort to gain the most data possible to inform the study and answer the research questions.

Goal Setting

As a part of my job, I often conduct various groups with students to meet their needs. These small groups are hosted during lunch or FLEX to best accommodate the students; therefore, this regular meeting time was perfect to meet with students individually each week to discuss their grades, attendance, and behavior; to set goals and strategize ways to improve; and to celebrate their successes. Using the researcher developed goal-setting forms (see Appendix B), students worked to improve their grades, attendance and/or behavior. The initial goal-setting sheet was completed during week one and goal-setting sheets were revisited bi-weekly. Therefore, new goals were

set or current goals adjusted during weeks one, three, and five. Students, parents, and all teachers received copies of this goal-setting form and each subsequent form.

As indicated by Zimmerman (2008), goal-setting is critical for student's to be motivated toward change. Each student was assisted with writing a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) during their individual session, and students were able to record notes during the session that would assist them in writing the goal. Duran (1981) was the original creator of the SMART model, but many organizations and programs have used this model to assist with goal setting. According to Ogbeiwi (2017), who studied SMART goals, "Writing SMART goals is fundamental to planning effective results-oriented action" (p. 335). Next, students wrote a draft of their goal and reviewed it with me. Finally, students wrote their final SMART goal that they would work toward achieving for the next two weeks. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) indicate that goals play a very important part in self-regulation of behavior and helps people to reach outcomes. Similarly, Parjaes (1996) indicates that people with high levels of self-efficacy tend to set larger goals and develop strategies to do so.

Grade Tracking

In relation to research question one, I tracked student's grades each week of the study beginning with collecting the baseline data. I collected students' grades every week on Monday morning, since all grades are scheduled to be updated by teachers on Thursday of each week. The grades for each course were recorded weekly. Even if a student was not failing some classes, the course grades were still tracked to show an

increase or decrease over time. Grade tracking was used to help students determine their baseline and to help in goal-setting.

Group Sessions

In addition to the individual progress monitoring and goal-setting meetings I had with student, each student came to a small group session with the entire study group each Wednesday. We held all-group meetings during FLEX for thirty minutes. If for some reason a student was absent on the day of the group meeting, I made the content up with the student in an individual setting on the day they returned to school. During these group sessions, I taught a curriculum I had tailored on what I felt were the issues that needed to be addressed for this group of at-risk students. The focus for the first week's group lesson centered on motivation. Lack of motivation is one factor that causes students to underperform in their classes. Each week's lesson included a video clip, mini-lesson, independent work, sharing of work, closure, and an exit survey students completed prior to leaving.

Exit Surveys

Exit surveys were provided to students to gauge their understanding of the lessons and need for additional resources each week. Using a Likert scale from *totally agree* to *totally disagree*, students answered three questions on the exit survey (see Table 5) that assessed whether the student felt the information helped them to better understand the topic, whether they needed more assistance with the topic, and whether they felt they could apply the contents of the lesson.

Students took these on paper for the first three weeks, and then they were asked to take them online the last two weeks once COVID-19 caused schools and close and students were learning from home. Because I was unable to reach all students during this time, the exit slip data for the first four weeks is much stronger than the data after the shutdown when students were learning from home and accessing the group meetings and exit slip via Google Meet and Google Classroom.

Interview Questions

Open-ended interviews were conducted to gain more insight into student's attitudes toward high school and the interventions that were provided to them. At the end of the six weeks, data was collected from students using open-ended questions as part of the qualitative data collection. According to Brucbacher, Powell, Skouteris, and Guadagno (2015), "Experts agree that the best way to elicit information from children is to ask questions that maximize narrative detail" (p. 96). By using open-ended questions, I was able to obtain more narrative data from each student interviewed. One-on-one interviews were conducted at the end of the study as a way to gain more insight into the students' thoughts and feeling about the interventions and help they received during the study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was more difficult to interview students since I could not simply call them to my office. I reached out to students and their parents through email, Google Voice phone calls, and Google Voice text messages and was able to complete three student interviews as a result. In addition, I conducted home visits for students I was unable to reach through the other methods, allowing me interview two additional students as a result. Simply analyzing numerical values would

not have accurately and completely reflected the intent of the study, but through the interviews, I was able to gain authentic student voice.

Pre- and Post-intervention Survey

Students were given pre- and post-intervention surveys to determine how their attitudes about ninth grade and their success in high school changed or did not change over the course of the intervention. The first time that students met with me individually before I began any mentoring, counseling, or instruction, they completed the Attitudes Toward School Survey (see Appendix D) developed by Anderson (1999). I used a survey that had already been established for many years to enhance validity and reliability and be able to obtain results that would be most helpful for this study.

This quantitative data tool measures attitudes that an individual has toward his/her school environment, including teachers, homework, grades, and learning, which uses a 15 item, 5-point Likert scale format and is appropriate for students in grades 6-12 (Anderson, 1999). Table 3 shows that responses range from a 1 equaling "totally disagree" to a 5 equaling "totally agree." Reverse coding is necessary to interpret the results of this survey as items 9-15 are reverse coded. When students have a higher score, it generally indicates that they have a more positive attitude toward high school. Reverse coding is recommended by experts in research to avoid response biases associated with "multi-item scales that are worded in a single direction (e.g., acquiescence, straight-line responding, etc.), psychometricians often recommend reverse wording (e.g., Baumgartner and Steenkamp 2001; Churchill 1979; Couch and Kenniston 1960; Nunnally 1978)" (Wong, Rindfleish, and Burroughs, 2003, p. 73). As for

reliability that has already been established, a correlation of at least .80 is suggested for at least one type of reliability as evidence; however, standards range from .5 to .9 depending on the intended use and context for the instrument. There were no costs or training necessary in order to administer this survey. This survey data was used to help determine the effectiveness of the interventions.

Data Analysis

Bi-weekly, throughout the course of this study, I recorded, sorted, and analyzed data that informed my research questions. In analyzing the data, I looked for trends such as an increase in grades, decrease in behavior incidents, and/or a decrease in days missed from school. I also looked for similarities in students' thoughts concerning the interventions and overall study.

From a quantitative study standpoint, I used Excel to record data from PowerSchool throughout the study. I assigned column names and numerical values to each point being recorded. I checked the database a second time after initial recording to find any data entry errors, since grades were live from teacher's gradebooks, and there was potential for them to change before I could check PowerSchool again. Therefore, I printed a copy of the quick lookup screen (Appendix C) and checked for inaccuracies before shredding those documents. I used Excel to record the number of behavior referrals and days missed from Educator Handbook and PowerSchool as well. Using tables and graphs, I showed trends in data as to whether there was an increase or decrease in the number of ninth graders failing courses, having behavior referrals, or attendance issues over the time of the entire study.

From a qualitative study standpoint, I transcribed the open-ended interviews and used coding to identify significant themes throughout the data. Coding is necessary with qualitative data to find emergent themes. Rossman and Rallis (2012) inform that coding is a process of organizing or chunking the data while writing words that represent each chunk of material in the margin. Tesch (1990) provides detailed information about how code using "Tesch's Eight Steps in the Coding Process." I also used the pre- and post-intervention survey responses to show emerging themes. The surveys helped to determine which interventions the students felt worked the best in assisting them toward success. This data was also be sorted into tables, and graphs and was used to show data trends. By using pie charts, bar graphs, and line graphs, I accurately displayed the data in a way that could be easily interpreted.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability within the study, I used several methods to enhance the readers' ability to trust the study. Triangulation was used as one method to show that multiple perspectives were gained. According to Herr and Anderson (2015), "The notion of triangulation, or the inclusion of multiple perspectives, guards against viewing events in a simplistic or self-serving way" (68). By using both interviews and surveys, I could triangulate my data by looking at the trends from two sources and comparing data points. According to Creswell (2018), it is important to use triangulation when working with qualitative data in order to show validity and reliability. Creswell (2018) suggested,

> Triangulate different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes. If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study. (p. 200)

I also used peer review or an expert audit by having a fellow counselor review the data with me to ensure I had provided proper interpretations.

The nature of interviews, surveys, and timelines for gathering data could present some challenges to the reliability of the data. I understood that conducting the open-ended interviews would be very time consuming in both the gathering and analyzing of the data. In addition, because students self-reported, the surveys could be inaccurate or provide misinformation due to the amount of time they spent on the survey. Further, even though grades should have been updated every Thursday, teachers sometimes forgot to enter grades, have been absent, or needed additional time to grade major assignments. I sent a weekly email to remind teachers that I was tracking data and that grades needed to be entered by four o'clock on Thursdays.

Ethical Concerns

I received permission from all parties necessary to include the school principal prior to beginning this study. I ensured that I had an informed consent on file for each student, signed by their parents, since they are minors. I maintained the confidentiality of my students in the study by never using their names or identifying information. I also used pseudonyms to refer to the district and school and described the surrounding area without providing any identifying information.

At all times, I kept the information of students involved in the study as well as all field notes, documents, and recording protected and confidential. I had a folder for each student where I kept all important notes and information, and stored them in a locked filed cabinet and only accessed them when students arrived for their meetings or I was working directly with the data to inform further instruction and monitoring. I also kept all recordings of interviews password protected, as well as my Google account which housed the surveys. Once the pandemic occurred and schools were closed, I stored everything in a locked file cabinet in my home office.

From the beginning, I communicated my intentions and the reason I was conducting this study. Students and parent(s)/guardian(s) were notified that they could stop participating in the study at any time. I based all findings on accurate data collection and did not make assumptions to inform any decisions concerning the study.

Summary

The goal of Chapter 3 was to outline the methodology of the research study that was conducted with a small group of students at a large, high performing school, in the Southeast. The data collected as part of this mixed-methods study was provided in detail as well as how the results were analyzed and used to prove my hypothesis. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and used to show data from multiple perspectives. In Chapter 4, I completed the data analysis to show the results of the study conducted with the ten students described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The graduation rate is an important topic nationwide as teachers, administrators and other educators push students toward the ultimate goal of earning a high school diploma. However, before educators begin to intervene, often it is already too late, and the window of opportunity has been missed. Macallumore and Sparapani (2010) indicated through their research that it is important to intervene early; they provided data that showed 22% of high school freshmen do not promote after their ninth-grade year. In addition, Leckrone and Griffith (2006) also found that if students fall behind in the freshman year, they have low odds of earning high school diplomas.

The problem of practice for this study is that if proper interventions are not taken, struggling ninth-grade students with high absences or behavior incidents that result in the loss of instruction are likely to fall behind and fail to promote to the next grade level. Developing a system to help underachieving high school freshmen successfully complete ninth grade to move to tenth grade with their peers was the driving force behind this research study. Behaviorism (Watson, 1914 and James, 1878), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), social cognitive career theory (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994), and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) helped to frame this study since they all focus on helping students understand the intentions behind their actions Two research questions guided the study:

1. Will participation in progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improve struggling ninth-grade students' grades and success rates for promotion to 10th grade?
2. Will struggling ninth-grade students who participate in progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans develop more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success?

A mixed-method research study was conducted to provide the most comprehensive data possible when it came to providing interventions to ninth-grade students. Quantitative research was necessary to examine the numerical data including grades, behavior incidents, and attendance, and to track that data over time. Qualitative research was also used to gain insights and understanding of students' general attitudes toward high school as well as students' and teachers' perceptions about the interventions that were provided.

After summarizing the methodology of this mixed-methods action research study on the effectiveness of providing specific interventions to first-time, struggling ninth-grade students, the data results will be discussed in an effort to show how the interventions impacted students' grades, behavior, and attendance, as well as their attitudes toward high school. In addition, the results of the teacher survey will be discussed to show how teachers perceived the interventions and whether they felt providing these was helpful to students. After analyzing and reviewing all quantitative data that has been sorted by instrument and all qualitative data by theme, I was able to look at the results across the entire study to draw conclusions. The conclusions drawn

will help to inform my practice as a counselor and may be of interest to other educators who may choose to replicate the study.

II. Data Presentation and Interpretation

Goal Setting

Progress monitoring of students was conducted throughout this study to help students reach their ultimate potential and academic success. There were four weeks of progress monitoring for students prior to the closure of school due to COVID-19. During each week, students met with me one-on-one in my office to discuss their progress and set goals. In weeks one and three, students completed a checklist to help them to understand which tasks they were already carrying out and which ones they needed to improve (see Appendix E). Graph 1 indicates how students' responses changed from week one to week three, at which time they had participated in the study group for two weeks.

Students completed the first checklist as part of their initial goal-setting form. I created the statements for the checklist to monitor areas where the students felt they needed the most improvement. Students placed a checkmark to indicate they were already doing the action mentioned in the statement. Students repeated this same checklist in week three to show changes or progress they were making.

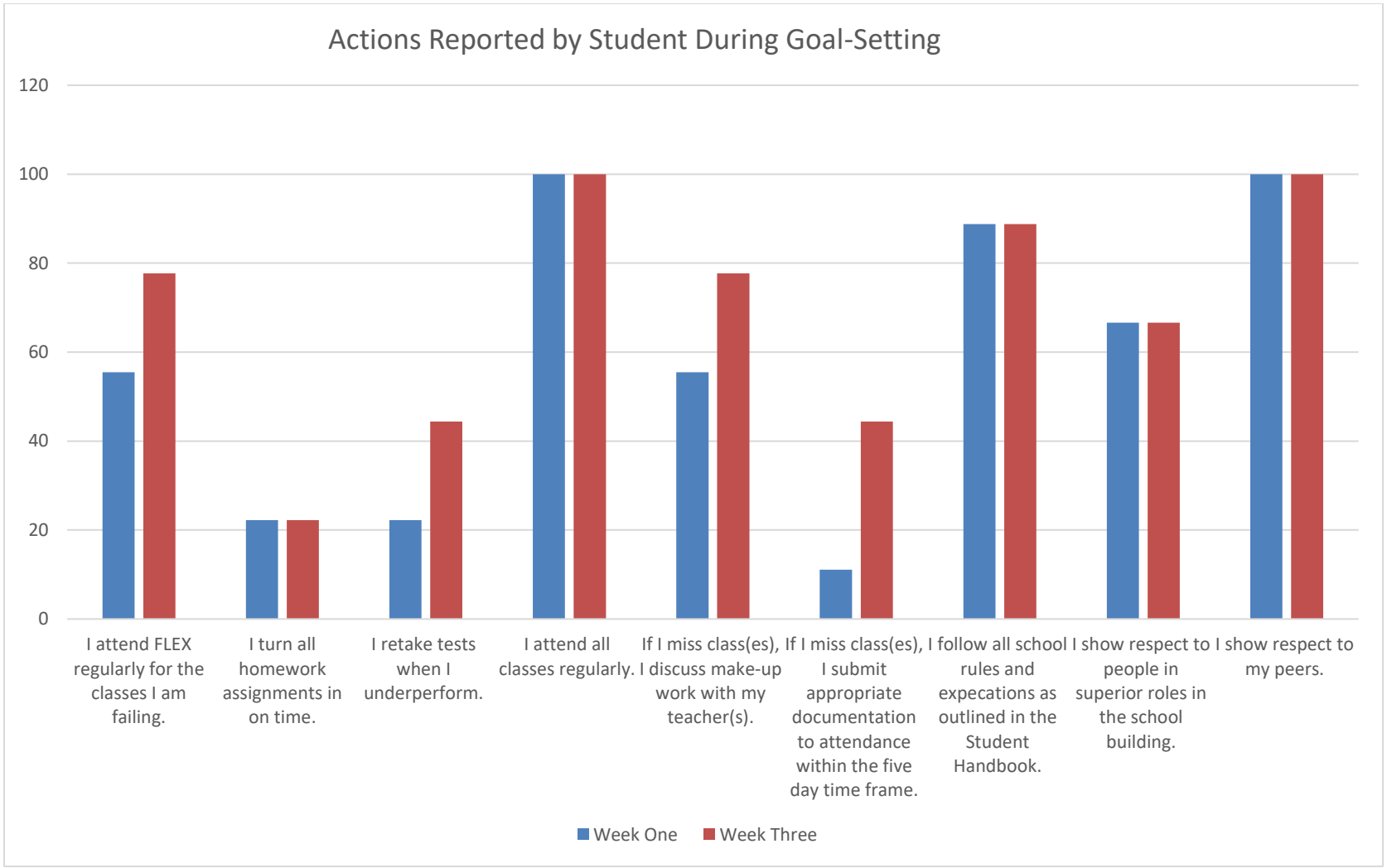

Figure 4.1 Actions Reported by Students during Goal-Setting

It is evident by the data represented in Figure 4:1 that all categories either increased or stayed the same in percentage of student performing the actions. Students who indicated they were attending FLEX for classes they were failing increased by 22.2%, from 55.5% to 77.7%. The percentage of students indicating they retake tests when they underperform also rose by 22.2%, doubling from 22.2% to 44.4% of students. Students who indicated they discuss make-up work with their teacher when they miss class rose from 55.5% to 77.7%, also a 22.2% increase. Finally, students who now said they were turning in documentation to attendance within five days if they were absent, increased the largest percentage overall of 33.3%, soaring from 11.1% to 44.4%.

It is important to note no actions showed a decrease, but most actions maintained the same percentage of students overall who were completing the tasks. Turning in homework on time, attending classes regularly, following all rules in the student handbook, respecting those in superior rules, and respecting peers all maintained the same percentages. However, this was not surprising since the week one percentages of students completing these actions was already high, leaving little room for improvement.

In both weeks that students recorded their responses, 100% of students indicated that they attended all classes regularly as well as showed respect to their peers. I did find it interesting to note that Student C indicated that he attended all classes regularly, but when he filled out the first survey, he had already logged three days of skipping his first block in the system. For this reason, it is important to remember that this data is solely based on student's perceptions of their actions.

When it came to the actions that were affecting student's grades the most, there was improvement in the results, but there is still room for more. Even with all categories showing an increase from week one to week three, students reported that most of them did not turn in all homework assignments on time, with only 33.3% of students doing so, even at week three of the study. Not turning in homework can negatively impact their grades; therefore, students were presented lessons on time management as well as monitoring of grades to aid in the importance of turning in their homework.

Since FLEX is an especially important part of our school day, it was positive to see that this action rose by 22.2%, increasing from 55.5% to 77.7%. This is a goal that I worked on with all students, as they each had to record their FLEX schedule for the week. At week three only 44.4% of students indicated that they retake tests when they underperform, an increase of 22.2%, but still less than half. This was also a major concern since not taking advantage of this opportunity had a negative impact on grades.

The school closing due to the pandemic presented several disruptive challenges to data collection during the study. Without the closure, students would have completed the checklist during week five; however, having them do it while school was suspended was not practical since many questions could not have been answered accurately and thus would have skewed the data.

Without the closure, the attendance actions would have been very important as well since students who fail to turn in excuses risk loss of credit for nonattendance. Even at the beginning of week three, only 44.4% of students were turning in excuses to attendance for their absences within five days of the absence. This result rose 33.3%

from week one to week three. While this action did show the biggest increase overall, the original percentage only accounted for one student; therefore, there are still five students who are not completing this action.

In summary, while there was still much room for students to improve in completing these actions, four categories showed an overall increase. More students indicated they were attending FLEX regularly, turning in homework on time, retaking tests, turning in attendance documentation, and discussing make-up work with their teachers. These are all important things that I had discussed with students during their weekly on-on-one meetings in my office as well as during the motivation and time management lessons in week one and two. Therefore, it was encouraging to see that more students are reporting that they are doing things to help increase their grades and make their school experience more positive.

In addition to completing these action charts to help them with goal setting, students actually set SMART goals in weeks one and three. After they drafted their goals and reviewed them with me during our one-on-one session, students wrote their final goals. Students placed these goals in their notebook and their parents and teachers also received a copy. In Appendix F, each student's final goal for weeks one and three are listed, as well as the chart indicating whether the goal was met. Graphs 2 and 3 reflect the percentage of students who met their goals in each week.

Due to COVID-19 closure of schools, the data opportunity was limited when it came to goal setting and the results of the checklist. While data was able to be obtained, if school had remained open, more data would have been collected in week 5

as students would have set new goals and completed another checklist to show their progress.

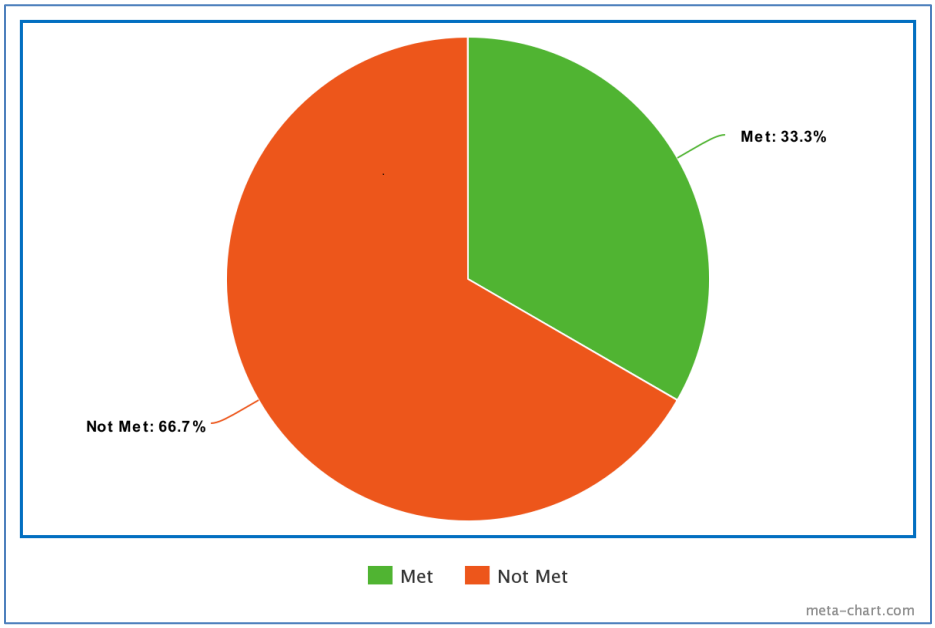

Figure 4.2 Goal-Setting Results Week 2

The goal data indicates that only 33.3% of students met their goal in week one, while 66.7% of students failed to do so. I discussed with students that they might consider making their goals narrower and more specific before we revised and wrote new ones for weeks 3 and 4. For students who did not meet their goal (see Appendix H), it is evident whether students altered their goals or changed them all together. Students had two weeks to try to reach these new goals. A copy of the goal was given to students to place in their notebook, as well as to their parents and teachers. Overall, students wrote goals that were more specific and not as number based but instead tracked overall improvement.

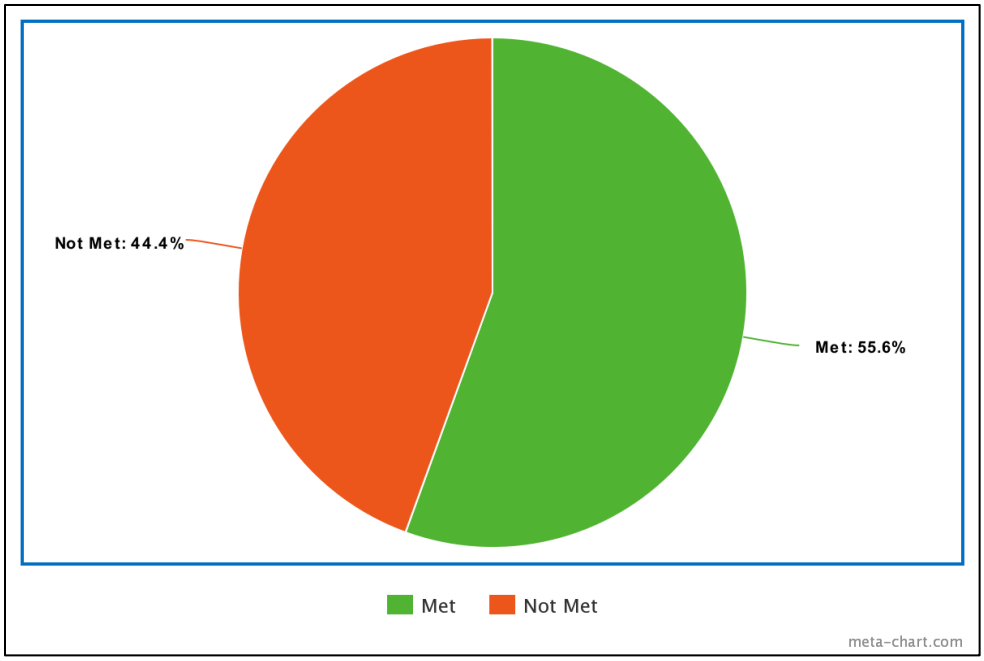

Figure 4.3 Goal-Setting Results Week 4

Even though school was cancelled due to COVID-19 before I got to meet with students individually for week five to go over whether they had met their goals, I was able to determine if their goals were met or not met since school was still in session for weeks three and four during the goal-setting time period. The number of students who met their goal versus those who did not was similar to the data from the first set of goals. As indicated in Graph 3 above, the data increased from 33.3% of students meeting their goals from weeks one and two to 55.6% meeting their goals in weeks three and four. The prediction is if school would have continued, students would have set goals for weeks five and six, there would have been another increase in the number of students who reached their goals.

Exit Surveys

Each week of the study, at the end of the group session, students completed an exit survey (see Appendix G). The surveys followed the same format each week so that students could get used to what was being asked of them. The information from the exit surveys helped to guide my discussion with students as well as future lessons. Question 1 always asked if they felt the lesson actually helped them, while Question 2 addressed whether they felt they still needed additional resources or help on the topics and Question 3 asked if they felt confident in what they learned.

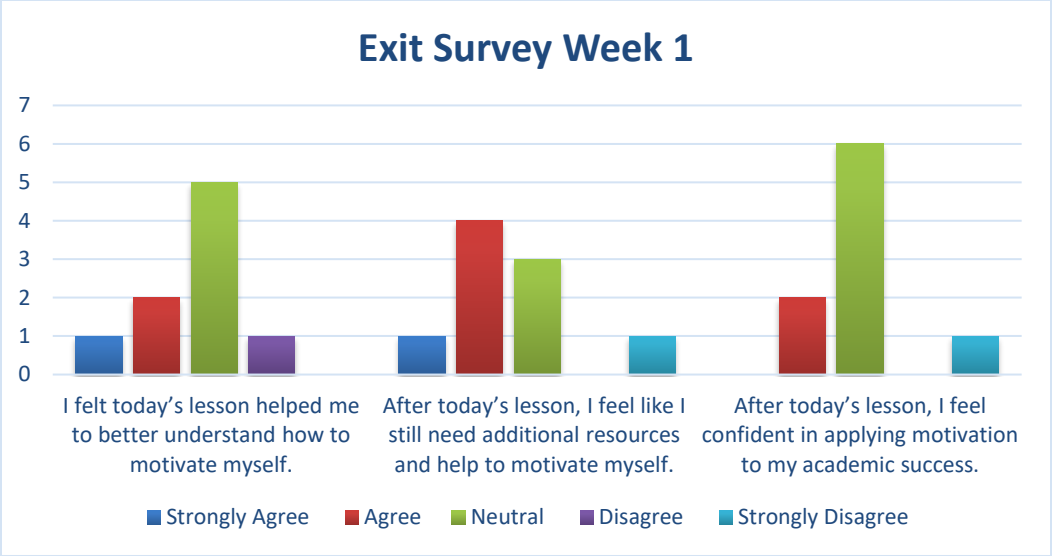

Figure 4.4 Exit Survey Week 1

For the week one lesson on motivation, only 33.3% of students thought the lesson truly helped them to feel more motivated or understand how to be more motivated. One student strongly agreed, two students agreed, five students were neutral, and one student disagreed. Therefore, 33.3% of students felt positive about the lesson, 55.5% of students did not feel positively or negatively, and only 11.1% of students felt negatively. As for the second questions, 55.5% felt that they needed more

resources on motivation to help them, and 33.3% were unsure if they needed more resources or not. Only 11.1% of students or one student in this cases felt they needed no additional resources for certain. Question three allowed me to understand that another lesson was needed in the future to provide students with resources. Only 22.2% of students felt confident in applying this information and 66.6% being neutral, teaching more on this topic will be necessary to ensure students can apply this topic to their success.

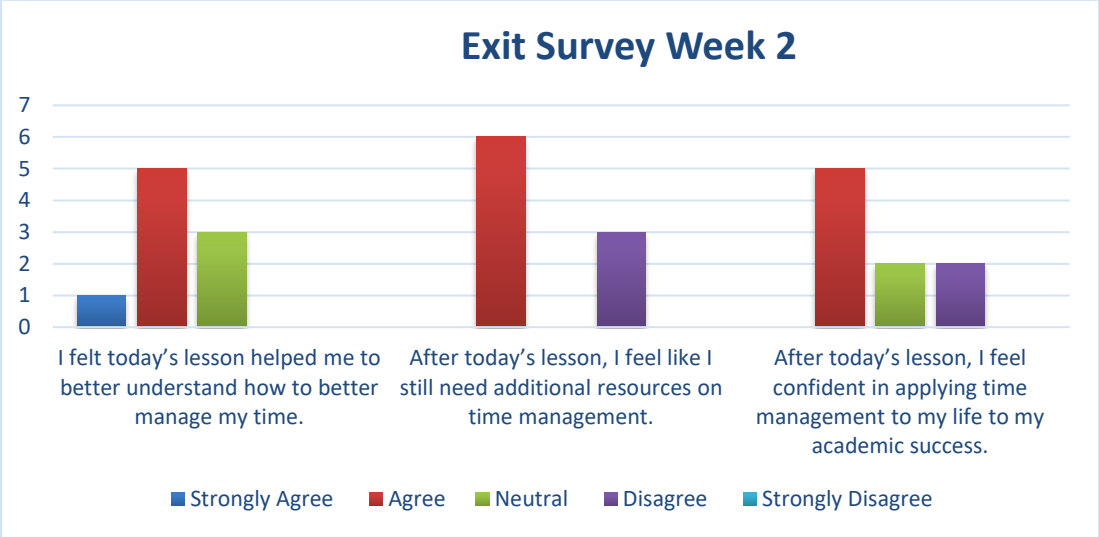

Figure 4.5 Exit Survey Week 2

For the week two lesson on time management, 66.6% of students felt positive that the lesson helped them to better understand time management, 33.3% did not feel positive or negative, and none of students felt negative about the lesson. When asked if they needed more resources, 66.6% indicated that they needed more resources on time management, and 33.3% indicated they did not feel they needed additional information. When it came to applying what they learned about time management to their academic success, 55.5% of students agreed they could apply the material, 22.2% of students

were neutral, and 22.2% of students disagreed. Since only two of the students had a negative response to whether they could apply this information themselves, the lesson appears to have been overall successful.

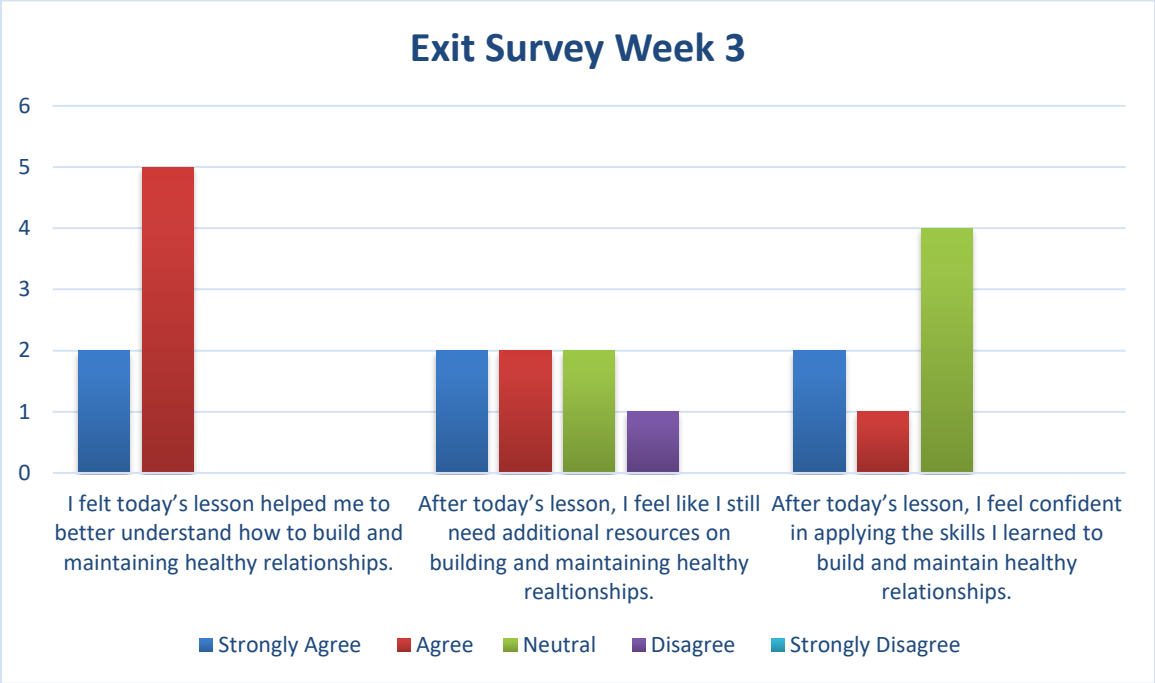

Figure 4.6 Exit Survey Week 3

In the exit survey after week three's lesson on building and maintaining healthy relationships, it is important to note that two students were absent for this week's lesson and were unable to complete the lesson or exit survey prior to school closing for COVID-19. There were 28.5% of students who strongly agreed that the weekly lesson helped them to be able to understand how to build and maintain healthy relationships. There was a very positive result of 100% of students agreeing that this lesson was helpful. When it came to students reporting whether they needed additional resources and help when it came to healthy relationships, one student or 57% of students felt they

needed more resources, while 28.5% of students were neutral, and one student, or 14.2% indicated they did not feel they needed additional resources. Finally, when students were asked if they could apply the content on building healthy relationships to their lives, 42.7% of students felt they could, while 57.1% of students answered with a neutral response.

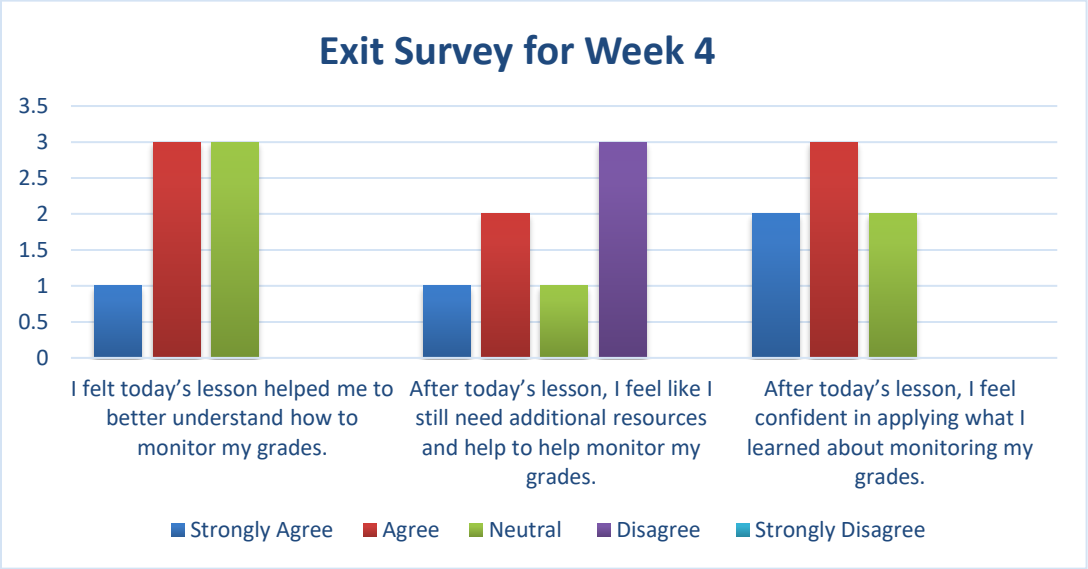

Figure 4.7 Exit Survey Week 4

After week four's lesson on monitoring grades, students completed an exit survey. This lesson was taught just prior to school being cancelled due to COVID-19, and there were two students absent from the lesson. I was unable to make-up this lesson with those students due to school being closed and the circumstances surround the school closure. There were 57% of students who felt positively about the lesson helping them to better understand grade monitoring, while 42.8% of students were neutral. When asked if they needed additional resources to help them monitor their grades, 42.7% agreed, 14.2% remained neutral, and 42.7% disagreed. Finally, students

responded to whether they felt they could apply what they learned from the lesson and 71.3% of students felt they could apply the material while 28.5% remained neutral. It was encouraging that 71.3% of students felt they could apply what they had learned as it would help students keep up with missing work and continue increasing averages, especially of classes they were failing.

When I had to adjust my plans due to COVID-19, I decided to adjust the curriculum for week 5 and 6 to fit the online learning format. Given the data from week one's lesson on motivation with only 20% of students feeling confident in applying the material, I taught one lesson on how to stay motivated during online learning. During this lesson, I focused on six ways that students could stay motivated: maintain a routine, record and complete daily tasks, get outside, accept support, and communicate with teachers, friends, and family (even from a distance). I posted the PowerPoint presentation to the Google Classroom, and I also sent a copy to each student and parent via email to reach the largest audience possible. Even in so doing, I only had two students who participated in the session. Those two students completed the exit survey for the lesson. Students A and J were the only students who attended each week's lessons both while in school and out of school. This certainly speaks to their motivation levels and parental involvement, since I know that both of their parents responded to me that they would have them complete the lessons and surveys. I invited other students to schedule a one-on-one meeting with me at a different time, but I did not hear from any students wanting to schedule this session. Exit survey data from weeks

five and six were omitted because with only two students responding, there was not enough data to accurately inform this study.

PowerSchool Data

The grade data obtained from PowerSchool results was analyzed according to each week. At the time that the baseline data for week one was gathered, the group of students were failing a total of 17 classes. All students were failing at least one class; one student was failing all four classes.

Table 4:1 *Baseline Data by Student*

Student	Block 1 Average Semester 2	Block 2 Average Semester 2	Block 3 Average Semester 2	Block 4 Average Semester 2	Unexcused Absences Already Accumulated Semester 2	Referrals Resulting in the Loss of Instruction Already Accumulated Semester 2
Student A	47	27	100	35	0	0
Student B	100	0	30	34	10	0
Student C	95	77	44	84	3	0
Student D	91	59	98	100	2	0
Student E	100	33	72	30	0	0
Student F	59	73	65	59	0	0
Student G	43	25	31	38	0	0
Student H	withdrawn					
Student I	69	66	89	50	0	2
Student J	72	100	42	95	0	0

Given this data, it was important to intervene, set goals with the students, and attempt to increase the student's grades. There were 33.3% of students who had already missed at least one day unexcused when the baseline data for week one was assessed. It is important to help students understand the consequences of missing days unless they have appropriate documentation. According to the student handbook at the school where the study was conducted, if students miss more than six unexcused days in a course, they will be denied credit due to absences. Finally, at this point 88.8% of students had no behavior referrals second semester, while one student had two referrals that resulted in loss of instruction (see Table 4.1). As appropriate, grades, attendance, and behavior were discussed with each student during their one-on-one meeting.

While the initial plan was to track attendance and behavior and be able to make conclusions about these data points, due to the pandemic and closing of schools, I was unable to collect enough data to inform a decision concerning these data points. Since we did not return to school for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, no additional attendance or behavior was recorded. Therefore, in the discussion that follows concerning PowerSchool data, I will only analyze student's grades and how their academic performance increased or decreased over time. During week two of the study, to be consistent with the baseline data that was collected, on Monday morning at 8:30 a.m., I pulled data from PowerSchool for each student in the group.

Table 4.2 *Week 2 Grade Data*

	Block 1			Block 2			Block 3			Block 4		
Student	**Wk 1**	**Wk 2**	**Progress**	**Wk 1**	**Wk 2**	**Progress**	**Wk 1**	**Wk 2**	**Progress**	**Wk 1**	**Wk 2**	**Progress**
A	47	57	+10	27	30	+3	100	100	--	35	51	+16
B	100	100	--	0	0	--	30	40	+10	34	58	+24
C	95	88	-7	77	71	-6	44	46	+2	84	84	--
D	91	86	-5	59	60	+1	98	73	-25	100	100	--
E	100	100	--	33	30	-3	72	60	-12	30	41	+11
F	59	57	-2	73	54	-19	65	35	-30	59	58	-1
G	43	69	+26	25	52	+27	31	66	+35	38	48	+10
I	69	69	--	66	60	-6	89	86	-3	50	37	-13
J	72	67	-5	100	89	-11	42	46	+4	95	95	--

Looking at the difference in student's grades over a one-week span reveals whether students began to work toward their goals or followed the plan that was outlined for them to turn in missing work. However, at the same time, even though teachers are told by administration they must update their grades every Thursday, it cannot be assumed that they did. In addition, all of the work

students had turned in may not have been graded and entered yet. Therefore, the data will be more accurate in the weeks to follow as more and more work is graded and entered.

In analyzing the immediate data concerning student grades, there were both positives and negatives. Of the 36 courses students were enrolled in, 13 or 36.1% of courses increased from week 1 to week 2. There were 8 or 22.2% that stayed exactly the same, and there were 41.6% that decreased. Three students showed significant improvement in their grades from week one to week two. Student A showed an improvement of 29 total points over all four courses, while student B also showed improvement with 34 total points over all four courses. Student G showed the most improvement of any of the students by showing an improvement of 78 points overall. While three students were able to raise their averages, many student's averages declined instead. Students C, D, and E dropped in all classes except for one which was by raised two points, and student F and H both showed grade drops in all their classes.

Table 4.3 *Week 3 Grade Data*

	Block 1			Block 2			Block 3			Block 4		
Student	**Wk 1**	**Wk 3**	**Progress**	**Wk 1**	**Wk 3**	**Progress**	**Wk 1**	**Wk 3**	**Progress**	**Wk 1**	**Wk 3**	**Progress**
A	47	68	+21	27	35	+8	100	100	--	35	60	+25
B	100	100	--	0	0	--	30	47	+17	34	58	+24
C	95	90	-5	77	71	-6	44	49	+5	84	84	--
D	91	86	-5	59	77	+18	98	59	-39	100	100	--
E	100	100	--	33	48	+15	72	73	+1	30	54	+24
F	59	50	-9	73	61	-12	65	34	-31	59	42	-17
G	43	44	+1	25	61	+36	31	83	+52	38	47	+9
I	69	69	--	66	42	-24	89	87	-2	50	30	-20
J	72	76	+4	100	91	-9	42	58	+16	95	96	--

As of week 3, 16 or 44.4% of courses had increased from week 1, which was an 8.1% increase in overall courses showing a positive result. The averages that stayed the same from week 1 to week 3 mimicked that of week 2's results and stayed at 22.2% of courses. Finally, 12 or 33.3% of courses showed a decrease in average, which was an 8.3% decrease from week 1 to week 3.

Prior to students coming for their individual meetings in week three, I again pulled all data from PowerSchool concerning student's grades. Table shows the increases or decreases in student's grades from week one to week three. Some grades dropped, some stayed the same, and others went up from week one to week three; however, the overall numbers of classes being failed only decreased by one course.

In week one, students were failing 17 courses and they were failing 16 in week 3. However, since that number is cumulative for all students, it is important to note a few individual achievements or declines in averages. Some students who were still failing one class had made significant improvements in their coursework. For example, Student A showed gains in every class, with one class remaining at a 100 average. Student A was now passing three out of four classes, with the most significant increase being 25 points, even in the class he was still failing, there was still an 8-point increase from week 1 to week 3. Meanwhile, student F is the only student who had significant drops across the board. This student dropped in all four classes and is only passing second block, with the biggest drop being thirty-four points. Student G improved in all four classes and had the most significant improvements of anyone in the group from week 1 to week 3. This student showed an increase of 52 points in block three, raising her grade from a F to a B average. Even though Student G is still failing two courses, there was a 99-point increase over all averages for this student. It is clear at this point based on the data that while some grades are increasing others are still decreasing.

Table 4.4 *Week 4 Grade Data*

	Block 1			Block 2			Block 3			Block 4		
Student	**Week 1**	**Week 4**	**Progress**	**Week 1**	**Week 4**	**Progress**	**Week 1**	**Week 4**	**Progress**	**Week 1**	**Week 4**	**Progress**
A	47	54	+7	27	42	+15	100	100	--	35	56	+21
B	100	100	--	0	39	+39	30	47	+17	34	58	+24
C	95	89	-5	77	69	-8	44	49	+5	84	84	--
D	91	88	-3	59	75	+16	98	71	-27	100	100	--
E	100	100	--	33	52	+19	72	81	+9	30	54	+24
F	59	51	-8	73	77	+4	65	70	+5	59	40	-19
G	43	44	+1	25	62	+37	31	83	+52	38	47	+9
I	69	69	--	66	42	-24	89	89	--	50	49	-1
J	72	77	+5	100	86	-14	42	60	+18	95	96	+1

From week one to week four many students improved their grades in their courses as evidence by the data. This was the first week where significant improvements could be seen overall in the increase of student's averages over time. Of the 36 courses students were enrolled in, 20 or 55.5% of courses increased from week 1 to week 4, which was a 19.4% increase from week 1. The number of courses where the average stayed the same represented 7 or 19.4% of courses, and the number of course that decreased from week 1 to week 4 accounted for 9 or 25% of courses. Grades were still fluctuating, but there was clear improvement shown by some students such as Student A showed significant improvements by raising all of his grades from week one to week four, with one grade staying the same. Student A's average in first block increased by 7 points from week 1 to week 4, and his second block

average increased by 15 points during the same time span. Though the student is still failing both of these courses, there have been marked improvements. Block three's average remained the same at 100, and block four's average increased by 21 points. The data also indicates how hard student B and G were working since they raised two classes a significant number of points, 39 and 52 points to be exact. Meanwhile, there were some students who showed increases and declines at the same time, such as student F who improved two grades, while two grades decreased.

Even though there were still 15 classes that are being failed by students in the study, the significant improvements shown by students show that being included in the study group is showing positive trends for some. When the increases were considered, collectively students raised overall averages by 331 points. Grades collectively decreased by only 102 points. Even though the decrease in grades seems to negate the positive data, the improvement significantly outweighs the decline. A very key piece of data is that only one new class is being failed; otherwise, if a course is being failed, it was already being failed at the beginning of the study. Student's grades could have decreased in some of those courses, but in almost all cases they were already failing the courses if they are failing them now. Students are now passing courses they were previously failing with 4 overall classes coming up to passing. While many averages are still below the passing mark, they are trending upward and if this continues, students should be able to get their average up to passing prior to the end of second semester. Many classes, thought they have not reached passing yet, are trending positively and should hi the passing mark soon.

Table 4.5 *Final Progress for Student's Grades*

	Block 1		Block 2		Block 3		Block 4	
Student	**Final Grade Average: Points up or down**	**Final Grade Average: Passed or failed**	**Final Grade Average: Points up or down**	**Final Grade Average : Passed or failed**	**Final Grade Average: Points up or down**	**Final Grade Average: Passed or failed**	**Final Grade Average: Points up or down**	**Final Grade Average: Passed or failed**
A	Up 33	Passed	Up 22	Failed	Down 10	Passed	Up 28	Passed
B	Down 10	Passed	Up 60	Passed	Up 25	Failed	Up 16	Failed
C	Down 5	Passed	Down 11	Passed	Up 7	Failed	Down 10	Passed
D	Down 2	Passed	Up 20	Passed	Down 17	Passed	Same	Passed
E	Down 19	Passed	Up 19	Failed	Down 2	Passed	Up 27	Failed
F	Down 5	Failed	Down 5	Passed	Up 5	Passed	Down 4	Failed
G	Up 14	Failed	Up 14	Failed	Up 45	Passed	Up 33	Passed
I	Up 12	Passed	Up 12	Passed	Down 2	Passed	Up 20	Passed
J	Same	Passed	Same	Passed	Down 23	Passed	Down 21	Passed

Even though grades were not able to be accurately tracked after week four, I was able to obtain a final average for each student. Even while they were completing work from home, these averages were impacted by information students learned during

their time in the group study. The final grade data chart shows how many classes were passed and failed as well as the rise and fall in averages. In addition, of the 36 courses students were enrolled in, 18 or 50% of averages increased over the course of the study. There were 15 or 41.6% of courses that students showed a decreased in over the course of the study. There were three course averages that stayed exactly the same over the course of the study, and these courses accounted for 8.3% of the total courses student were enrolled in. While 50% of courses having increased in average as compared to 41.6% of courses decreasing in average, does not seem significant, it is important to note that of those 41.6% of courses, only two out of 15 or 13.3% of courses had averages that resulted in the course being failed. In addition, when compared to week 2 data, there was a clear increase overtime. The percentages rose from 36.1% of courses increasing in week 2 to 50% increasing when final grades were stored at the end of semester 2. Averages that declined in week 2 represented 41.6% of courses and when grades were stored at the end of the semester, 41.6% of courses still showed a decrease from week 1 to the final grades that were stored. This shows a positive result in the percent of courses that increased in average over time.

The data shows significant improvements in students' grades overall. In general, even if student averages went down from the baseline average that was recorded, they still passed the course. The only exception were two averages that declined, but those two students were already failing those courses when the baseline data was being collected. The other averages that declined represented 14 averages that decreased but still resulted in the students passing those courses.

There were seven averages that increased but the students still failed those courses. Those seven added to the two that students failed (that were already being failed), accounted for a total of nine courses being failed during second semester by this group of students. When compared to baseline data, the number of courses being failed was cut in half or by 52.9% to be exact. When baseline data was collected, 17 courses were being failed and at the end of the grading period for semester two, only nine courses were being failed.

Averages were raised collectively by 445 points. There were a total of 27 classes passed by the entire group. Two student's averages stayed the exact same but they passed those courses. Every student in this group was in danger of not promoting successfully to tenth grade based on the school district's program of studies and policy indicating they needed six courses (1 English, 1 Math, 4 other credits) to promote to tenth grade. However, at the end of second semester, only three students did not promote. Therefore, 66.6% of students promoted successfully to tenth grade, while 33.3% did not successfully promote. This is significant data considering when the study began and baseline data was pulled, there was only 1 or 11.1% of students who would have successfully promoted as compared to 8 or 88.8% of students who would have been retained based on their overall averages in their coursework.

Pre and Post Survey

To gather data related to question 2, students were given Anderson's (1999) Attitudes Toward School (see Appendix D) as a pre- survey week one before any intervention began and as a post-survey at the conclusion on the study. This survey

helped me to analyze perceptions of students when it came to things they may struggle with in high school and be better able to address their needs and concerns. Obtaining this information from each student prepared me to understand their perspectives prior to my first individual meeting with them.

Due to limited access of students during COVID-19, I was not able to get all students to complete this survey. I sent it to them in various formats to include online and on paper, but I only received five of nine responses via the online Google survey that was created with the questions provided by Anderson's survey. I placed the survey on Google forms to make it easier for students to access, but all questions were the same as previously answered at the beginning of the study.

I compared the pre-survey with the post-survey for Attitudes Toward School (Anderson 1999), and this gave a clear picture of how student's perceptions changed from the beginning of the study to the end of the study. If you look at the data as a collective group (see Appendix D) it becomes apparent that six survey questions received a more positive response, at the same time, five questions stayed about the same, and only four went down. In the discussion that follows a positive result was found if students responded that they either agreed or totally agreed to the prompt for questions 1-8, or responded that they totally disagreed or disagreed to the prompt for questions 9-15 (since they were reverse coded as previously mentioned).

Students were asked several questions on the survey about their teachers. Question 1 asked, whether students liked their teachers, the pre-survey indicated that 44.4% of students responded positively to this prompt, during the post-survey this result

increased to 60% of students responding positively. When asked other questions about their teachers, Question 10 asked whether they felt their teachers cared about them, originally 77.7 percent of students indicated their teachers cared, and that result rose to 80% in the post-survey, which was very close to the same result. When asked if their teachers understand them (Question 11), 33.3% of students responded that they felt their teachers understood them in the pre-survey, while that percentage rose to 40% in the post-survey or about the same. When asked if they are interested in what they teachers have to say to them (Question 12), 33.3% said they were interested in the pre-survey and that number rose to 60% in the post-survey. Similar to the questions of whether their teachers care, Question 2 inquired about whether the principal cares about students. Initially, 88.8% of students responded positively to this questions answering agree or strongly agree, but at the post-survey, that number declined to 60% of student responding positively.

When asked questions about how they are doing in school, students responded to Question 3, “I am doing well in school,” with 0% initially responding positively and that result rose to 40% in the post-survey. When asked (Question 4), “I am learning a lot in school,” 33.3% of students responded positively in the pre-survey, but that percentage decreased in the post-survey to 0% of positive responses.

Students were questioned about their grades and whether they cared about them (Question 14), and 55.5% of students in the pre-survey indicated they did care, while that result rose to 80% in the post-survey. Similarly, Question 5 asked if they try

hard to get good grades, and 33.3 % agreed they do during the pre-survey, and that percentage was about the same or 40% for the post-survey.

A series of questions was asked about their school and high school in general. When questioned about doing homework on time (Question 6), 33.3% responded they did so in the pre-survey, and that percentage stayed about the same or represented 40% in the post-survey. Students were asked in Question 7 if they enjoy school activities such as sports and clubs; 55.5% responded positively in the pre-survey, but that number declined and represented 40% in the post-survey. Students were asked if they planned to complete high school (Question 8), and 77.7 % responded positively on the pre-survey, and the number stayed about the same in the post-survey with 80% of students responding positively. The survey asked if they were angry at their school (Question 9) and 66.6% initially responded that they were not angry, with that number rising to 80% in the post-survey. The final question (Question 15) asked students if they felt a part of their school, and 88.8% first responded that they do, while 100% responded that they do in the post-survey.

Overall, 40% of responses had a more positive result from pre-survey to post-survey, 33.3% had a more negative response, and 26.6% stayed the same. If data is further broken down and the data from the five students who took the post-survey is compared to their initial data, there were 32% of responses that were more positive, 24% that were less positive, and 44% that stayed the same. Even though some responses declined, it is apparent with 32% responses trending positive many student's attitudes toward high school did improve over time.

Teacher Survey

In order to collect more data during the pandemic school closing, I reached out to all of the teachers of the students in my group and asked them to complete a survey that I created (see Appendix H), which provided both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data pieces will be discussed in this section and the qualitative data will be addressed thematically in the following sections.

Teachers of the students in my group were asked to complete the Google survey, and I sent the link via email. Of the twenty-two teachers, some of whom had multiple students in the group, eighteen completed the survey. The teachers' perspectives added a new dimension to my data collection. Even though this was not my original intention, after careful consideration of the pandemic-related restrictions on my study, I felt it would provide an additional layer of analysis.

When teachers responded to the prompt asking them to consider student grades of previously failing students from February to March, 38.8% indicated "somewhat" increased or increased, 44% indicated that grades had "stayed about the same," and 16.6% indicated that grades had decreased (see Appendix H). It is important to note that these are teacher's perceptions of the student's grades, since teachers were not presented with data from the study. In actuality, at the time teachers took this survey, 55.5% of student grades, 25% of grades decreased, and 19.4% stayed the same.

Teachers responded to the prompt about student attendance (see Appendix H) indicating that students' attendance showed a mostly positive trend. Although 38.8%indicated that attendance stayed about the same, when the somewhat increase

and increase responses are combined, 55.5% saw some type of increase in student's attendance. Only 5.5% of teachers reported seeing a decrease in attendance after students started the group.

It is interesting to note their perspectives because data previously shared on attendance shows quite the opposite. For all except two students, absences increased after the study began. While teachers' perceptions that students had missed fewer classes when actually they had missed more supports the previously discussed attendance data, it presents questions concerning this discrepancy.

When prompted with "during the time span from February to March, I noticed that the behavior of students (in Mrs. Dreher's small group) who had previously received discipline referrals," teacher shared their responses to perceptions on student's behavior, 50% felt that the behavior stayed the same. The remaining teachers were equally divided with 12.5% reporting either decrease or somewhat decrease and 12.5% indicating somewhat increase or increase.

Teachers were prompted with "students were taught a lesson on motivation. Did you see overall motivation (for the students who were in Mrs. Dreher's small group)," and responded as to whether they saw any increase or decrease in the student's motivation. The majority of teachers reported a positive trend in student's motivation with 66.6% of teachers saying that student's motivation somewhat increased or increased. Some teachers reported motivation stayed about the same with 33.3% reporting this perception.

Teachers were prompted with, “students (who were in Mrs. Dreher’s small group) were taught a lesson on healthy relationships. Did you notice their ability to build and maintain relationships with others” and 61.1% reported a positive trend by saying that students abilities somewhat increased or increased. Another 38.8% of teachers said that the student’s abilities to build and maintain healthy relationships stayed about the same.

Based on students being able to manage their grades using PowerSchool, teachers were prompted with “students (who were in Mrs. Dreher’s small group) were taught a lesson on managing PowerSchool and keeping track of missing grades. Overall, did they keep track of grades and what they were missing”, and reported many students’ abilities stayed about the same. There were 44.4% who reported student’s abilities stayed about the same. However, it must be considered that some students could have already been monitoring their grades. The rest of the results indicated an increase in student’s ability to maintain or keep track of their assignments and missing work. There were 55.5% of teachers who reported seeing some type of positive trend in student’s behavior or ability concerning this task.

Teachers were asked to respond about time management, “students who were in Mrs. Dreher’s small group) were taught a lesson on Time Management. Did you find their ability to manage time,” 61.1% reported that student’s time management stayed about the same. There were 38.8% that reported any type of increase in time management on behalf of the student.

Teachers were questioned about whether students attended FLEX learning time, "between the months of February and March, did students who were members of the small group attend your FLEX sessions," and the majority of students attended FLEX about the same as before, with only 5.5% of teacher reporting students came less frequently and 11.1% of teachers reporting that students came a little less. The positive data indicated that 27.7% of teachers saw some increase whether a little more or more frequently in their students attending their FLEX sessions.

The quantitative data presented in terms of the instruments that were administered or used to assess students to included goal-setting, exit surveys, PowerSchool data, pre- and post- surveys, and teacher surveys all helped to draw conclusions about research question one: "Will participation in progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improve struggling ninth-grade students' grades and success rates for promotion to 10th grade?" While there are many data points to consider, the results of 66.6% of students promoting to the next grade level, as compared to the baseline data indicating only 11.1% of students would promote, speaks to the success of the interventions provided in the study.

Use of a mixed-methods study allowed me to analyze the thoughts and feelings of students as well as teachers. My field notes from individual sessions, group sessions, teacher surveys, and student interviews were used to develop themes in order sort my qualitative data. Through coding of responses, the themes of academic performance and motivation directly related to positive attitudes toward high school. The data as it

relates to these two themes will be explored to provide conclusions as to whether the academic interventions that were provided to students were successful.

Academic Performance

Many conversations during the course of this study surrounded the term *academic performance.* Whether the word that I coded based on my field notes, surveys, and interviews was *grades*, *achievement*, or *success*, they all connected to the theme of academic performance. As a result of this study, I sought to find if students' academic performance would increase overtime if given proper interventions, and whether their attitudes toward high school would improve.

Student comments during group and individual sessions indicate that their attitudes toward high school improved over time. From the start of the sessions many student's attitudes were much different than later in the sessions. Student G began her first individual session with, "I'm glad you want to help me, but I don't do good in school. I never get good grades." In week one, Student A said, "I just don't care about my grades." Student D began the study with a more positive attitude than the other students, saying during week one, "I want you to help me get my grades up."

When I looked at meeting notes from week four, it was clear that students had gained more positive attitudes toward high school. Student G showed a positive shift in her attitude when she said, "I am so happy that I pulled my grades up; you have helped me a lot." This shows a change in student G's attitude from week one when she did not

seem to care about grades, to week four when she was happy to be doing better. In contrast to his comments in week one, Student A said in week three, “I am actually passing math, I can’t even believe it. I’ve been working hard to do better.” This also shows a more positive attitude toward high school.

Based on the open-ended interviews I conducted with students, the following statements hold importance when it comes to showing an improvement in student’s attitudes toward high school. Student D said, “Being in the group made me want to try harder and want more for myself in the future.” Student E discussed making the connection of “how easy it is to keep my grades up if I just try.” These statements indicate that students saw a positive change in themselves from being in the group.

Teachers also made comments during the open-ended portions of the survey they took that related to academic performance. Based on some of the teacher’s comments, it was apparent that they also noticed an increase in positive attitudes toward school. Teacher B stated about one student, “She seemed to care about her grades a bit more and asked for help more.” Teacher F noted, “There was a positive change to students’ [in the study] overall attitude.” Teacher K also reported, “Students’ attitude toward school and teachers improved.” Teacher I found that the intervention group “positively impacted student performance,” but also noted that one student “cared more about her grades but there was no follow-through.” All teachers answered with a positive response when questioned about whether they felt the interventions were helpful to ninth graders to keep them on track for graduation. Even though one

teacher did not see follow-through, it is clear through the teacher's responses that they felt the group did cause positive changes in the students and their overall academic performance.

Students and teachers indicated through their responses that the monitoring of grades and academic performance component of the group was helpful. It was clear in the beginning that some students did not seem concerned about pulling their grades up or did not care about their grades, but the positive feedback from students and teachers seems to indicate that over time students did become committed to the purpose of the group.

Motivation

The first lesson I taught to students during group was about motivation because it was so important that they understood what needed to be the driving force behind their success. During that lesson, students discussed what motivated them: Student A said *money*, Student J said *food*, and Student G said, *proud parents*. While it was clear that students had different motivators, they agreed that motivation was important to be successful in school.

Student comments also indicated positive growth relative to motivation. During the week one lesson, Student J stated, "It's just hard for me to get my work done once I get home and everyone is there and loud." On a similar note, student A stated, "I just don't feel like doing any work after I get home." Student D seemed to be the most

motivated when she stated, “I just like to get it all done so I can do what I want to do the rest of the night.” However, later in the semester during online learning, Student A said, “I’ve actually been doing all my work and am passing most of my classes.” Student J told me, “I’ve been focusing and setting aside the time to get the work done.” This showed a more positive attitude toward her academic achievement, and it was supported with grade data since she passed all classes during the second semester.

In the teacher survey responses, several mentioned motivation as well. Teacher A said, “I saw one student who showed signs of really becoming more motivated.” Teacher D said, “I really saw students’ work ethic improve.” Two teachers indicated that students seemed motivated to change their attitudes: Teachers F noted, “I saw positive change to her overall attitude,” and Teacher K indicated that a student’s “attitude toward teachers and school improved.” While motivation can be difficult to measure, it seems based on the comments from teachers that at least some students did increase their motivation as a result of being in the study.

Research Questions

When it comes to answering the research questions, relying on all data presented and analyzed in this chapter becomes very important. Data supports a positive outcome for the first research question:

> Will participation in progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improve struggling ninth-grade students’ grades and success rates for promotion to 10th grade?

The data does indicate that overall students who participated in progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improved their grades and promotion chances. When final semester 2 averages were assessed, it was determined that 18 or 50% of courses showed an increase in averages, while 15 or 41.6% showed a decrease in average. Another 3 or 8.3% of courses stayed exactly the same over the course of the semester. When this data is compared to data from earlier in the semester, it is clear that the improvement was significant, when compared to data from week 2 of the study, 36.1% of average increased; therefore, 50% shows a steady increase from early data. In week 2, 41.6% of students had averages decline from week1 and that number remained the same at the end of the study with 41.6% of averages decreasing over the semester from baseline to final averages. While there were still nine courses being failed, this was a clear improvement from the 17 that were being failed at the beginning of the study when data was obtained. Students collectively raised their averages by 445 points from the beginning to the end of the study. Since all students were at-risk for not promoting, having 66.6% of students promote successfully with the other 33.3% hoping to promote at the end of summer, indicates true success. Furthermore, when this data is compared to baseline data of only one student or 11.1% having grades that would have met promotion standards and 88.8% not meeting promotion standards at the beginning of the study, this is a very significant improvement.

Additional data to support that the interventions provided to students were helpful and did improve student's grades and success rate to promotion is important. At

the end of week two, 33.3% of students had met the goals they set during the first week, and that percentage rose to 55.6% at the end of week 4. Reaching their goals had a direct impact on student's grades and achievement. Of teachers who responded to the survey, 55% indicated that student's abilities to monitor grades and keep track of missing assignments increased. This data indicates that students who are keeping track of grades and missing assignment are more likely to increase their academic performance. In addition, completion of the checklist of actions showed increases between week one and week 3. Students who were now retaking failed tests, attending FLEX regularly, and making up missed work each increased by 22.2%, indicating that more students were completing these tasks which direct impacts on academic performance. This numerical data shows that the research question is supported with evidence of an overall increase in student's grades and performance.

When it comes to research question two, quantitative data was used to determine whether students' attitudes became more positive toward high school and their academic success. Qualitative data supports the second research question:

> Will struggling ninth-grade students who participate in progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans develop more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success?

The Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999) survey was one indicator as to whether students developed a more positive attitude toward high school and academic success. I compared the pre-survey with the post-survey for Attitudes Toward School (Anderson 1999), and this gave a clear picture of how student's perceptions changed from the

beginning of the study to the end of the study. When data is assessed collectively, it becomes apparent that 40% of survey questions received a more positive response, at the same time, 33.3% of questions stayed about the same, and only four or 26.6% decreased. When data is further broken down and the from the five students who took the post-survey and was compared to their initial data, there were 32% of responses that were more positive, 24% that were less positive, and 44% that stayed the same. Even though some responses declined, it is apparent with 32% responses trending positively many student's attitudes toward high school did improve over time. While some student's attitudes did trend more positively over the course of the study, the data did not seem to indicate an overall noticeable result.

The Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999) survey in isolation is not enough to support a conclusive answer to research question two, since the results were not overwhelming positive; however, when paired with teacher survey comments and the positive student comments during individual meetings, group sessions, and interviews, a more accurate conclusion can be reached.

Teacher data from the survey also indicated whether students developed a more positive attitude toward high school and academic success. When teachers were asked if they felt that interventions were helpful to students, 100% of teachers responded positively. This helps to support that the group was positive for students. More specifically certain teachers mentioned that students, "seemed to care more about their grades," "students improved their grades," and "students improved their work ethic." This shows that many teachers also felt the group was positive for students.

When pre- and post-survey and teacher survey data are paired with student comments such as, “I am actually passing math; I can’t even believe it. I’ve been working hard to do better” and “I want you to help me get my grades up,” it becomes clearer that student’s attitudes toward high school did improve. When drawing a conclusion about whether the group as a whole developed more positive attitudes about high school, the data overall supports that some students did; however, there were not enough teacher or student responses to indicate that they developed more positive attitudes toward high school and success. To yield a positive result, there would need to be more positive responses and clearer data in regard to the pre- and post-survey students took about their attitudes toward high school. Therefore, as for research question two, the data does not clearly indicate a more positive result when it comes to student’s attitudes toward high school

Summary

Through both qualitative and quantitative data, this chapter analyzed results that were collected concerning academic success and positive attitudes toward high school. The data proved that students who were included in the group had a higher success rate when it came to their academic courses. While there were still some students who failed classes and did not successfully promote, overall most students experienced success with the group. Even for students who failed classes and did not promote, all three still indicated that the group was helpful for them toward understanding themselves more what is necessary to be successful. Qualitative data also supports that some student’s attitudes toward high school became more positive

over time; however, there is not enough data to conclude that the study group's attitudes toward high school and academic success became more positive as a result of the interventions. The quantitative and qualitative data seem to both indicate that the study group was a positive experience for students.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to examine whether specific interventions could help at-risk ninth-grade students have improved attitudes toward school and improve academic success to help them stay on track for on-time graduation. In examining the interventions of progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans, the problem of practice was addressed that when students are not provided with proper interventions or a support system, the likelihood of them being able to perform well and promote to the next grade level on time is less likely. To address this, I created a small group of ten at-risk students who would become part of a cohort to help determine whether specified interventions would provide the needed support for successful grade promotion.

Three factors were used to identify students who were at risk of not graduating on time or promoting to the 10^{th} grade on time. First-time, ninth-graders were considered as participants if they were struggling in regard to grades, attendance, and behavior during semester one.

This study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. Will participation in progress-monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans improve struggling ninth-grade students' grades and success rates for promotion to 10th grade?
2. Will struggling ninth-grade students who participate in progress monitoring, small group sessions, and academic intervention plans develop more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success?

As for research question one, it was determined that students who participated in the group for this study did experience more academic success and thus had a higher chance of promoting to the next grade level at the end of their ninth-grade year. When final semester 2 averages were assessed, 50% of courses showed an increase in averages, 41.6% showed a decrease in average, and 8.3% of courses stayed exactly the same over the course of the semester. When this data is compared to data from earlier in the semester, it is clear that the improvement was significant, when compared to data from week 2 of the study, 36.1% of average increased; therefore, 50% shows a steady increase from early data. In week 2, 41.6% of students had averages decline from week1 and that number remained the same at the end of the study with 41.6% of averages decreasing over the semester from baseline to final averages. Since the number of classes students were failing decreased significantly 17 classes were originally being failed, nine classes actually were failed and averages increased collectively by 445 points from the beginning of the study to the end of the study, so this

suggests that the study group helped them achieve more academic success. The number of students meeting the goals they set also increased from 33.3% at the end of week two to 55.6% at the end of week 4. In addition, all students began the study at risk of not promoting to 10th grade based on failing at least one first semester class; however, 66.6% of the students in the study successfully promoted as compared to the 11.1% who were expected to promote considering baseline data. These data points indicate that students in the group did improve their grades and chances and success rate for promotion to 10th grade.

As related to research question two, data indicated that study participants developed more positive attitudes towards both school and their own academic success. The Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999) pre- and post-surveys was one measure as to whether students developed a more positive attitude toward high school and academic success. 40% of responses increased, 26.6% of responses stayed the same, and 26.6% of responses decreased. This data coupled with positive comments from teachers and students concerning student's overall attitudes about school improving, indicates that some students had more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success. However, more data would be needed to be able to conclude that overall student's had more positive attitudes toward high school and academic success.

In this chapter the results of the study will be discussed in relation to the literature reviewed prior to the study, indicating how this data supports and informs

that literature. The chapter will include recommendations for putting the findings into practice as well an implementation plan for my school and district. This will be followed with reflection about the research process and changes and additions that could improve future replications of the study. Finally, limitations of the research study as well as needed future research related to this study will be addressed.

Results Related to Literature

Based on the findings of my research questions, it was determined that when students participate in certain interventions as outlined that their grades and academic performance increase as well as their attitudes toward high school. To ground the finding of this study in other literature, the theories behind this study are important to note. Watson's (1914) behaviorism, Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, and Lent, Brown, and Hackett's (1994) social cognitive career theory, as well as self-efficacy theory all have direct connections to the working parts of this study. Watson (1914) discussed behavior as causing a direct response to a situation and having an impact. Through this study, it was observed, that even if students were still failing a class, their overall behavior and attitude toward academic success seemed to increase. Teachers also indicated in the survey they took that students seemed more interested in their learning.

Bandura (1986) reminds that as part of social cognitive theory goal setting is important. Students were able to set goals to help them reach ultimate success. Again, even if students did not reach their goal, they were working toward a better outcome. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) through social cognitive career theory focus on

academics, performance, and the future. Bandura's (1997) finding surrounding self-efficacy were echoed by Parjaes (1996) in that students with higher self-efficacy set better goals for themselves. Students indicated that they wanted to finish high school, with no results trending negatively for this category by the final Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999) survey. For the one student who indicated having to work was an obstacle at times, she was still able to persist and push pass that obstacle to pass all her classes during the final semester.

When it comes to the problem of practice for this research study surrounding the graduation rate being impacted if students do not successfully promote, Neild (2009) presented data showing that 30% of high school dropouts never promoted past ninth grade year. Similarly, Bornsheur et. al (2011) also mentioned that those retained in ninth grade are six times less likely to graduate on time. Through the data in this study, it was proven that with interventions in place, students are more likely to pass their classes and promote with their same aged peers to the next grade level on time.

Macallumore and Sparapiani (2010) discussed retention and the graduation rate and their findings that ninth grades have the lowest GPA's, most missed classes, and the majority of their grades are failing. In terms of this study the grades seems to be the most significant impact for ninth graders based on data at my school. Rumburger (2011) also discussed the direct connection among being retained and therefore dropping out. It is important to note his finding and the importance of making sure ninth graders successfully promote.

Recommendations and Implications

The first step in furthering this study is to replicate it on a larger scale in my counseling department, which will allow us to gather and collect a larger body of data that can inform decisions and practices over time. I have already discussed this with administration and for next school year, they want to implement this across all grade levels. To facilitate every struggling student in our school benefitting from this type of intervention, a group will need to be implemented with seniors, juniors, sophomore, and freshmen during the 2020-21 school year. For all grade levels, students will be selected based on grades, attendance, and behavior, just as they were for the current study. Unlike this study, next school year the study will begin after approximately the first three weeks of the first semester; that three-week period will allow us to begin collecting data points.

A focus group of counselors, teachers, administration, and students who are involved in next year's study will be formed to gather and review feedback for continued improvement of the interventions program. It will also be important to collect a full semester of data without the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and to gather more data over time and without modifications or adjustments.

Once our counseling department has implemented this program across all grade levels, and we have more data to inform our decisions and future implementation, I will present this plan at the district counselor meeting to all high school counselors. It is my recommendation that this study be carried out in each high school in our district. I will conduct a professional development session where I invite counselors to learn how to

implement this program. When it comes to students, proactive efforts to help them increase their chances for success in high school would work only to their advantage. Once this group can be started with each freshman class, it is expected that because of the rapport and relationships formed with students in the ninth-grade group that these students would always feel comfortable reaching out and coming back to the group leader for help.

I have already applied to share the findings of my study and the steps in forming this group at the annual counselor conference for our state this year. This should reach a large audience of around 300 counselors. I will be able to host about 120 total people throughout the day, and this information would then get disseminated throughout the counselors in our state who attend my session. I will also seek to present at other state or national conferences to get this idea out to other counselors, administrators, and stakeholders.

Reflection

By conducting a mixed-methods study, I was able to interpret both numerical data as well as understand the innermost feelings and perspectives of student participants and teachers directly associated with the students in the study. Having the teachers respond to questions and give their feelings regarding the study was helpful to know that the teachers validated the intentions of the group and study. When compared with my original intentions of the study, I found that attendance and behavior did not seem to have as great an impact on students as grades. Perhaps if we had been in school the entire semester, I would have seen more negative attendance

and behavior issues; however, as it stood, the attendance and behavior problems were minimal. As this study is conducted again and more data is analyzed, it would be important to note whether this should be part of the data that is used to form the group.

In addition to the conclusions formed about my research questions based on data, I learned through conducting this study that while some students seemed reluctant to join the group in the beginning, this group was a positive experience for students. Even though the group has concluded, I still have students reaching out to me via Google Voice about their summer classes and needing assistance. Building positive relationships with students helps them to feel supported and in so doing ultimately increases their performance.

I expected for the results of the study to prove that when students were given interventions to help with their success in high school, they would have a higher rate of passing their classes and develop more positive attitudes toward high school. The results supported my expectation that students who were included in a group with interventions in place were more likely to pass their classes and promote at the end of ninth grade year.

The sudden, unexpected disruption of the factors surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic certainly affected my research study. In the beginning it was difficult to decide how to proceed because officials were not prepared or able to make a determination as to whether we would return to school. As a result, I tried to maintain the original plan for my study as much as possible, since I knew there was a chance we

would return. If we had returned, I would have picked up in the study where I left off at week four. However, once it was determined that we would not return to school in the spring semester of 2020, I had to alter the plans for my study.

I was not able to track grades, attendance, or behavior during the time of e-learning. I was able to obtain final grades which were an accurate reflection of student's abilities and efforts, but the grades prior to the final averages were not consistent. Many students were working from hard-copy packets, so teachers were not able to grade their work for weeks at a time until they received the next packet. Therefore, tracking grade data week to week would have resulted in inaccurate data. Attendance and behavior data were not available since students were not at school during this time.

I decided to set up a Google Classroom for students, since most were already using this online format. I also set up a Google Voice number so students could contact me. The hope in doing each was that if students did not have a computer, they may have a cell phone. I created a flyer with my information and link to Google Classroom and my number for Google Voice. I sent this information to parents via email, but for the students who did not join, I did a home visit where I either delivered this information or left it in the door with a note explaining I had stopped by if no one was home.

I completed two more weeks of curriculum lessons for students in Google Classroom and taught them via Google Meet on Wednesdays at 12:00 p.m. I adjusted the content of these lessons to fit the online learning format and to help best support students during this time. A copy of each week's lesson was emailed to parents and

students. Students were informed that they could contact me at any time via Google Voice to set up a different time for me to teach them the lesson if necessary or to receive the lesson over the phone with supporting documents delivered to them in a packet format.

As a result of these conditions, I had to alter my research questions to no longer include attendance or behavior monitoring. There was not enough data during the four weeks students were in school to be able to draw appropriate conclusions. Since this was part of how I initially screened students for inclusion in the group, I included some data about behavior and attendance for review; however, I was no longer able to draw strong conclusions to support my former research questions.

To encourage greater participation, I formatted the Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999) survey into Google Forms. This was helpful so that I could email the link to parents, place the link in Google Classroom, and text the link to students if the joined Google Voice. To gather more data, I also created a teacher survey to understand teachers' perceptions of the study and their students' performance and attitudes in their classes.

I was unfortunate that the study could not be conducted exactly as originally planned due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in the Google Meet sessions and interviews, it was determined that some students were not even living at the addresses that were in PowerSchool. I even did home visits to try and find all students to participate, but I was still unable to reach everyone. This limited my data and is why I

chose to add the teacher survey piece to be able to gather even more data surrounding this study based on the teacher's perceptions.

Since COVID-19 interrupted this study, so I would like to do it again for the entire semester and collect all the data so that I can see clearer results concerning the grades and other data points.

This research benefited my professional career greatly since I had already been progress monitoring students since the beginning of my counseling career. This allowed me to take progress monitoring to a high level and provide precise interventions for this group of students and see how they were impacted. In addition, it allowed me to develop a system of identifying and tracking the students as opposed to only basing it on grades alone.

This study adds to the body of literature on goal setting, progress monitoring, graduation rate, and positive attitudes toward high school. While there are many students that have been conducted surrounding ninth-grade students, there did not seem to be much research concerning providing interventions specifically to at-risk ninth graders. Most of the literature that can be found discusses eight-grade students who are going to enter high school the next year. This study adds to the literature about at-risk ninth-grade students.

Limitations

The biggest limitation of this study was COVID-19 and school closures. During the years that I planned this research study, I would not have envisioned that school closure would have prevented my study from being conducted in the way I had intended. Clear

progress was being shown by the data, but the study had to abruptly change after week four. Since there were several weeks when we were unsure what would occur as to whether school would resume, it was difficult to make decisions regarding the study. Once we knew for certain that school would not resume, alterations to the study were made such as relying on teacher data and perceptions to further support the study.

Another limitation of the study was the amount of time I had to conduct the research and gather data. While this brief study did contribute data to what my research questions sought to answer, particularly for the research question concerning promotion to next grade level, the longer the data could be gathered the more informative it would have been. Conducting a study where students are followed from ninth grade to 12th grade and expected graduation would have been ideal.

Communication with parents was another limitation due to not being able to reach parents on numerous occasions. Obtaining the permission slips from students for inclusion in the study was difficult, even after personally calling each parent, sending reminder emails, and leaving phone messages. I was unable to get responses from some parents after receiving the signed permission slips for their child, even after reaching out to them in various formats concerning their child's progress. Especially considering the circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic, parental support and involvement became an important avenue to keeping students involved in the study activities, and unfortunately, I was unable to keep them all involved.

Summary

In conclusion, when interventions are provided to at-risk ninth-grade students their likelihood of success towards academics and their overall attitude toward school becomes more positive. By students participating in progress monitoring and group session weekly, as well as goal setting, and an increased focus on academics their success rate when it came to their academic courses increased overall. Students and teachers indicated that there was evidence that the group was positive for students, and students reported that they felt more positive about school in most cases. This study helps those researching at-risk students, ninth-grade students, the graduation rate, goal setting, as well as other closely related topics, understand how to implement a program that closely monitors and comes alongside students to give them the most chance of success.

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APPENDIX A

PARENTAL CONSENT AND STUDY OUTLINE

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

My name is Staci Wessinger Dreher and I am the lead school counselor at your child's high school. I am currently enrolled at the University of South Carolina—Columbia campus, as a doctoral candidate studying Curriculum and Instruction with a focus in Curriculum Studies. During second semester, I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and I would like to invite your child to participate. As a school counselor, I am very passionate about helping students be successful during their high school years.

The purpose of this study is to work with students in reaching academic, attendance, and/or behavior goals through one on one counseling sessions to include progress monitoring and a twelve week focus group designed to help students learn strategies to be successful. If you choose for your child to participate in my study, the following can be expected:

1. Students will participate in a group session that I will lead on Wednesdays during FLEX to learn strategies to assist in their high school performance.
2. Students will meet with me one on one for counseling sessions in order to set a bi-weekly goal through progress monitoring.
3. Students will complete bi-weekly goal-setting forms that will be used to help facilitate the one on one meetings.
4. At the beginning and end of the study, students will complete a 15 question survey on Attitudes Toward School (Anderson, 1999).
5. Students will participate in one interview that will be audio recorded at the end of the study.

In order to protect the student's identify, all information gathered will be kept confidential. All student data will be protected by being stored in either a locked cabinet or on a password protected computer using a password protected Google account. For the purpose of this study, all student names will be excluded or I will use pseudonyms when referring to students. I will be the only person in district with access to any of the data collected through my study. The results of the study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but your identity will not be revealed. Since students will participate in a group session once a week, they will encounter other students who are participating in the same study. Confidentiality will be discussed during each group session; however, it will be up to the group members to ensure total confidentiality of what is discussed during the group session. At no time will individual student's grades, attendance, or behavior be discussed during the group unless the information is voluntarily disclosed without being prompted by the counselor.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. Should you consent for your child to participate in this study, you and your student reserve the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me using the information provided below. Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please complete the bottom portion of this form and return to the counseling office.

With kind regards,

Staci Wessinger Dreher
Lead School Counselor
803-835-0014
drehers@----------.org

_____ Yes, I give consent for my child to participate in the research study conducted by Staci Dreher.

_____No, I do not give consent for my child to participate in the research study conducted by Staci Dreher.

Parent Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

GOAL-SETTING FORMS

Goal-Setting Form for Student Progress Monitoring

Initial Goal-Setting Form

Student Name: _____

Baseline Grade(s):

1st Block	
2nd Block	
3rd Block	
4th Block	

Baseline Attendance:

1st Block	
2nd Block	
3rd Block	
4th Block	

Baseline Number of Major Behavioral Incidents that Resulted in Loss of Instructional Time:

Total Number	

Please place a checkmark next to each of the statements that apply to you.

I attend FLEX regularly for classes I am failing.	
I turn all homework assignments in on time.	
I retake tests when I underperform.	
I attend all classes regularly.	
If I miss class(es), I discuss make-up work with my teacher(s).	

If I miss class(es), I submit appropriate documentation to attendance within the five day time frame.	
I follow all school rules and expectations as outlined in the Student Handbook.	
I show respect to people in superior roles in the school building.	
I show respect to my peers.	

Notes to assist with setting a goal:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Draft of Your Goal:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Is Your Goal…

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Relevant

Timely

Final Goal for the Next 2 weeks:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Goal-Setting Form for Student Progress Monitoring

Bi-Weekly Form (Weeks 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11)

Student Name: _____

Week for Meeting: _____

Grades at Time of Meeting:

1st Block	
2nd Block	
3rd Block	
4th Block	

Attendance at Time of Meeting:

1st Block	
2nd Block	
3rd Block	
4th Block	

Major Behavioral Incidents that Resulted in Loss of Instructional Time since Our Last Meeting

Total Number	

Please place a checkmark next to each item that applies to you since our last meeting.

I attend FLEX regularly for classes I am failing.	
I turn all homework assignments in on time.	
I retake tests when I underperform.	
I attend all classes regularly.	
If I miss class(es), I discuss make-up work with my teacher(s).	

If I miss class(es), I submit appropriate documentation to attendance within the five day time frame.	
I follow all school rules and expectations as outlined in the Student Handbook.	
I show respect to people in superior roles in the school building.	
I show respect to my peers.	

APPENDIX C

QUICK LOOK-UP SCREEN POWERSCHOOL

M1	M2	M3	E1	S1	M4	M5	M6	E2	S2	Absences		Tardies	
										S2	19-20	S2	19-20
					54 54	85 85	84 84	[i]	77 77	0	0	0	0
					42 42	53 53	59 59	[i]	49 49	0	0	0	0
					100 100	86 86	50 50	[i]	90 90	2	2	3	3
					56 56	70 70	76 76	[i]	63 63	4	4	3	3

This is an example of what it looks like when student's grades are obtained from PowerSchool each week. For our district there are three marking periods or six week periods in each semester. For semester two, we had M4, M5, and M6. Due to COVID-19 school closure, there were no final exams in the E2 column. The final average was recorded in S2.

APPENDIX D

ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL SURVEY AND RESULTS

1.	I like my teacher(s).	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
2.	The principal cares about students.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
3.	I am doing well in school.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
4.	I am learning a lot in school.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
5.	I try hard to get good grades.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
6.	I usually do my homework on time.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5

7.	I enjoy school activities such as sports or clubs.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
8.	I plan to complete high school.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
9.	I am angry at my school.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
10.	My teacher(s) don't care about me.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
11.	My teacher(s) don't really understand me.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
12.	I am not interested in what my teachers have to say to me.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
13.	I am not really learning anything important in school.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
14.	I don't really care about my grades.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5
15.	I do not feel a part of my school.	Totally Agree 1	2	3	4	Totally Disagree 5

Table D.1 *Student Pre-Survey Data*

Student ID	Total	1:Totally Agree %	Response 2%	Response 3%	Response 4%	5:Totally Disagree %	Total %
Question 1	**9**	0%	44.4%	55.5%	0%	0%	**100%**
Question 2	**9**	55.5%	33.3%	11.1%	0%	0%	**100%**
Question 3	**9**	0%	0%	66.6%	22.2%	11.1%	**100%**
Question 4	**9**	11.1%	22.2%	22.2%	44.4%	0%	**100%**
Question 5	**9**	11.1%	22.2%	44.4%	22.2%	0%	**100%**
Question 6	**9**	111%	22.2%	55.5%	0%	11.1%	**100%**
Question 7	**9**	33.3%	22.2%	11.1%	22.2%	11.1%	**100%**
Question 8	**9**	66.6%	11.1%	22.2%	0%	0%	**100%**
Question 9	**9**	0%	11.1%	22.2%	33.3%	33.3%	**100%**
Question 10	**9**	0%	11.%	11.1%	44.4%	33.3%	**100%**
Question 11	**9**	0%	11.1%	55.5%	33.3%	0%	**100%**
Question 12	**9**	0%	44.4%	22.2%	22.2%	11.1%	**100%**
Question 13	**9**	11.1%	33.3%	0%	44.4%	11.1%	**100%**

Question 14	**9**	11.1%	11.1%	22.2%	33.3%	22.2%	**100%**
Question 15	**9**	0%	0%	11.1%	66.6%	22.2%	**100%**

Table D.2 *Student Post-Survey Data*

Student ID	Total	1:Totally Agree %	Response 2%	Response 3%	Response 4%	5:Totally Disagree %	Total %
Question 1	**5**	20%	40%	40%	0%	0%	**100%**
Question 2	**5**	40%	20%	40%	0%	0%	**100%**
Question 3	**5**	0%	40%	10%	20%	20%	**100%**
Question 4	**5**	0%	0%	80%	20%	0%	**100%**
Question 5	**5**	0%	40%	40%	20%	0%	**100%**
Question 6	**5**	0%	40%	40%	0%	20%	**100%**
Question 7	**5**	20%	20%	40%	0%	20%	**100%**
Question 8	**5**	80%	0%	20%	0%	0%	**100%**
Question 9	**5**	0%	0%	20%	0%	80%	**100%**
Question 10	**5**	0%	0%	20%	40%	40%	**100%**

Question 11	**5**	20%	0%	40%	40%	0%	**100%**
Question 12	**5**	0%	20%	20%	60%	0%	**100%**
Question 13	**5**	0%	20%	40%	40%	0%	**100%**
Question 14	**5**	0%	0%	20%	60%	20%	**100%**
Question 15	**5**	0%	0%	0%	40%	60%	**100%**

APPENDIX E

GOAL-SETTING CHECKLISTS

Table E.1 *Goal-Setting Checklist Week 1*

Statements	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G	Student H	Student I	Student J
I attend FLEX regularly for the classes I am failing.		√				√		√	√	√

I turn all homework assignments in on time.									√	√
I retake tests when I underperform.		√				√				
I attend all classes regularly.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
If I miss class(es), I discuss	√			√	√			√	√	√

make-up work with my teacher(s).										
If I miss class(es), I submit appropriate documentation to attendance within the five day time frame.			√					√		

I follow all school rules and expectations as outlined in the Student Handbook.	√	√	√	√	√	√			√	√
I show respect to people in superior roles in the	√	√		√	√			√	√	√

school building.										
I show respect to my peers.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table E.2 *Goal-Setting Checklist Week 3*

Statements	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D	Student E	Student F	Student G	Student H	Student I	Student J
I attend FLEX regularly for the classes I am failing.	√	√	√		√	√			√	√

I turn all homework assignments in on time.		√						√	√	
I retake tests when I underperform.		√			√	√				√
I attend all classes regularly.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
If I miss class(es), I discuss make-	√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√

up work with my teacher(s).										
If I miss class(es), I submit appropriate documentation to attendance within the five day time frame.	√	√			√			√		√
I follow all school rules	√	√	√	√	√	√			√	√

and expectations as outlined in the Student Handbook.										
I show respect to people in superior roles in the school building.	√	√		√	√			√	√	√
I show respect to my peers.	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

APPENDIX F

GOAL-SETTING CHARTS

Table F.1 *Goals Set by Students Weeks 1 and 2*

Student	Final Goal for Weeks 1 and 2
Student A	I will follow my FLEX schedule as written in an effort to improve my grade sin 1st, 2nd, and 4th block.
Student B	I will turn in all missing assignments by February 26th by attending FLEX every day and working afterschool on assignments.
Student C	I will pull my grade up 10 points in English by turning in work, studying, and doing homework.
Student D	By March 2nd, I will raise my grade to a 70 or higher by trying to focus more in class, working harder, and asking for help.
Student E	I will pull my English and math grades up to passing by turning in work, going to FLEX, and turning in homework.
Student F	I will make up all missing work to improve my grade in 1st and 4th block.
Student G	I will turn in missing work, take more notes, and study in English to bring my grade up 10 points.

Student H	I will bring my grades in math and science up to a C average by asking more questions, studying more, and turning in my work on time.
Student I	I will raise my grade 10 points in 1st and 2nd block over the next two weeks.
Student J	To finish all my make-up work and bring my grade up in English to at least passing.

Student	Final Goal for Weeks 1 and 2	Goal Met or Not Met
Student A	I will follow my FLEX schedule as written in an effort to improve my grade sin 1st, 2nd, and 4th block.	Met
Student B	I will turn in all missing assignments by February 26th by attending FLEX every day and working afterschool on assignments.	Not Met
Student C	I will pull my grade up 10 points in English by turning in work, studying, and doing homework.	Not Met
Student D	By March 2nd, I will raise my grade to a 70 or higher by trying to focus more in class, working harder, and asking for help.	Met

Student E	I will pull my English and math grades up to passing by turning in work, going to FLEX, and turning in homework.	Not Met
Student F	I will make up all missing work to improve my grade in 1st and 4th block.	Not Met
Student G	I will turn in missing work, take more notes, and study in English to bring my grade up 10 points.	Met
Student H	Withdrawn from study	Withdrawn from study
Student I	I will raise my grade 10 points in 1st and 2nd block over the next two weeks.	Not Met
Student J	To finish all my make-up work and bring my grade up in English to at least passing.	Not Met

Table F.2 *Goals Set by Students Weeks 3 and 4*

Student	Final Goal for Weeks 3 and 4
Student A	I will continue to follow my FLEX schedule each week so that I can continue to improve my grades.
Student B	I will finish turning in all my missing work in math by the end of the first six weeks grading period.
Student C	I will go to FLEX sessions for English to improve my grade.

Student D	Turn in my High School 101 work on time in order to increase my grade.
Student E	I will pull my English and math grades up to passing by going to FLEX and turning in all missing work that I can.
Student F	When I miss an assignment, I will turn it in within five days.
Student G	I will go to FLEX, turn in work, and study to bring my failing grades up to passing.
Student H	I will bring my grades in math and science up to a C average by asking more questions, studying more, and turning in my work on time.
Student I	I will turn in work and go to FLEX to get my English grade up to passing.
Student J	To turn in any missing work that my teacher will allow in English to increase my grades.

Student	Final Goal for Weeks 3 and 4	Goal Met or Not Met
Student A	I will continue to follow my FLEX schedule each week so that I can continue to improve my grades.	Not Met
Student B	I will finish turning in all my missing work in math by the end of the first six weeks grading period.	Met
Student C	I will go to FLEX sessions for English to improve my grade.	Met
Student D	Turn in my High School 101 work on time in order to increase my grade.	Met

Student E	I will pull my English and math grades up to passing by going to FLEX and turning in all missing work that I can.	Not Met
Student F	When I miss an assignment, I will turn it in within five days.	Met
Student G	I will go to FLEX, turn in work, and study to bring my failing grades up to passing.	Not Met
Student H	Withdrawn from study	Withdrawn from study
Student I	I will turn in work and go to FLEX to get my English grade up to passing.	Not Met
Student J	To turn in any missing work that my teacher will allow in English to increase my grades.	Met

APPENDIX G

EXIT SURVEYS

Table G.1 *Exit Survey Week 1*

Student	I felt today's lesson helped me to better understand how to motivate myself.	After today's lesson, I feel like I still need additional resources and help to motivate myself.	After today's lesson, I feel confident in applying motivation to my academic success.
Student A	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral
Student B	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Student C	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Student D	Agree	Neutral	Agree
Student E	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Student F	Neutral	Agree	Neutral
Student G	Neutral	Strongly Disagree	Neutral
Student H	Withdrawn from study		
Student I	Neutral	Agree	Neutral

Table G.2 *Exit Survey Week 2*

Student	I felt today's lesson helped me to better understand how to better manage my time.	After today's lesson, I feel like I still need additional resources on time management.	After today's lesson, I feel confident in applying time management to my life to my academic success.
Student A	Agree	Agree	Agree
Student B	Neutral	Disagree	Disagree
Student C	Agree	Disagree	Disagree
Student D	Agree	Agree	Agree
Student E	Agree	Agree	Agree
Student F	Neutral	Agree	Neutral
Student G	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
Student H	Withdrawn from study		
Student I	Neutral	Agree	Agree
Student J	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree

Table G.3 *Exit Survey Week 3*

Student	I felt today's lesson helped me to better understand how to build and maintain healthy relationships.	After today's lesson, I feel like I still need additional resources and help to build and maintain healthy relationships.	After today's lesson, I feel confident in applying what I learned about building and maintaining healthy relationships.
Student A	Agree	Agree	Neutral
Student B	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral
Student C	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
Student D (absent)			
Student E (absent)			
Student F	Agree	Neutral	Neutral

Student G	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Strongly Agree
Student H	Withdrawn from study	Withdrawn from study	Withdrawn from study
Student I	Agree	Agree	Neutral
Student J	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Strongly Agree

Table G.4 *Exit Survey Week 4*

Student	I felt today's lesson helped me to better understand how to monitor my grades.	After today's lesson, I feel like I still need additional resources and help to help monitor my grades.	After today's lesson, I feel confident in applying what I learned about monitoring my grades.
Student A (absent)			
Student B	Neutral	Agree	Neutral
Student C	Neutral	Disagree	Agree
Student D (absent)			
Student E	Strongly Agree	Neutral	Strongly Agree

Student F	Neutral	Disagree	Neutral
Student G	Agree	Disagree	Agree
Student H	Withdrawn from study	Withdrawn from study	Withdrawn from study
Student I	Agree	Agree	Agree
Student J	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree

APPENDIX H

TEACHER SURVEY

Below is the link to access the Google Survey that was given to teachers to gauge their responses concerning student's reactions to the interventions provided. After viewing the link, you can see the data that is provided below based on each question that was posed in the survey. The last three questions were qualitative in nature and those responses are discussed within the body of the dissertation.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Y0vlqEQUKXbXimu7qtCrZ3TlPML3Gd9glylU84taknI/edit

When Considering Students Who Were Previously Failing…Student Grades …

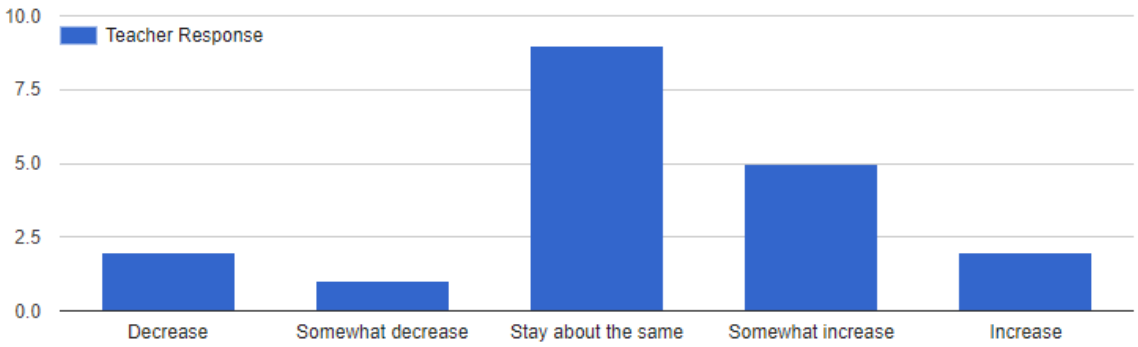

Figure H.1 Teacher Survey Question 1

When Considering Student's Attendance…Student's Attendance …

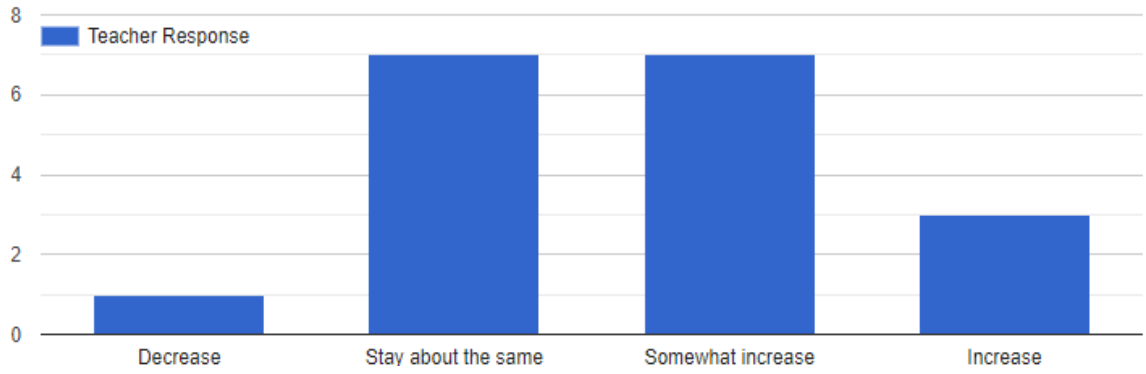

Figure H.2 Teacher Survey Question 2

When Considering Student Behavior…Student Behavior …

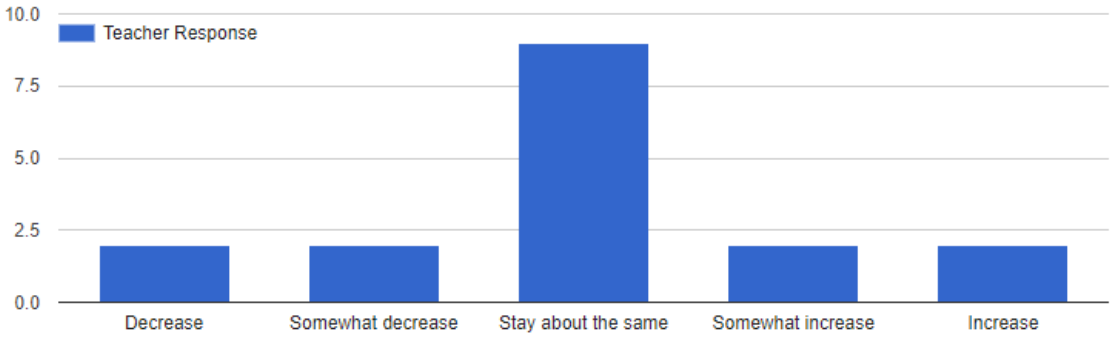

Figure H.3 Teacher Survey Question 3

After Students Were Taught a Lesson on Motivation…Their Motivation…

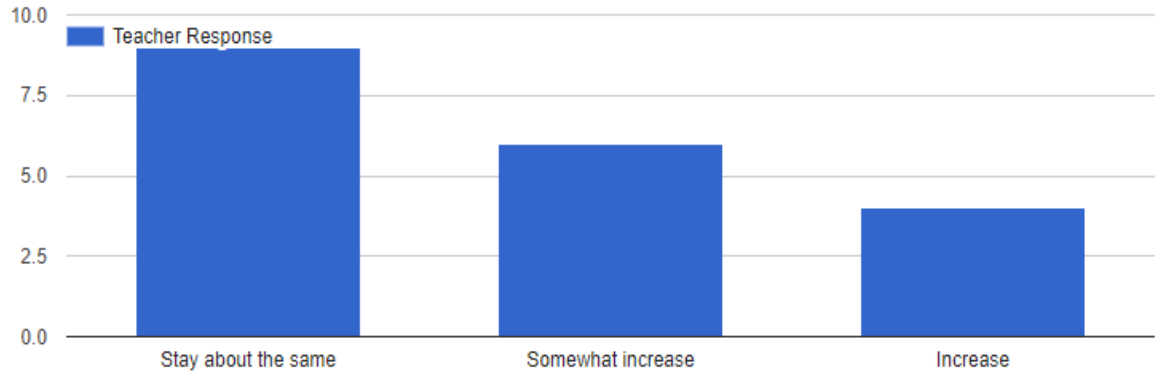

Figure H.4 Teacher Survey Question 4

After Students Were Taught a Lesson on Healthy Relationships…Their Relationship Building Skills…

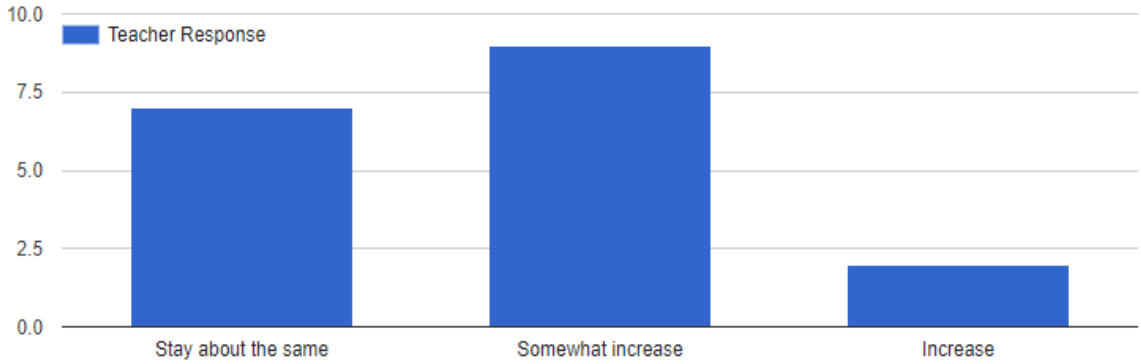

Figure H.5 Teacher Survey Question 5

After Students Were Taught a Lesson on Managing Grades…Their Ability to Manage Grades…

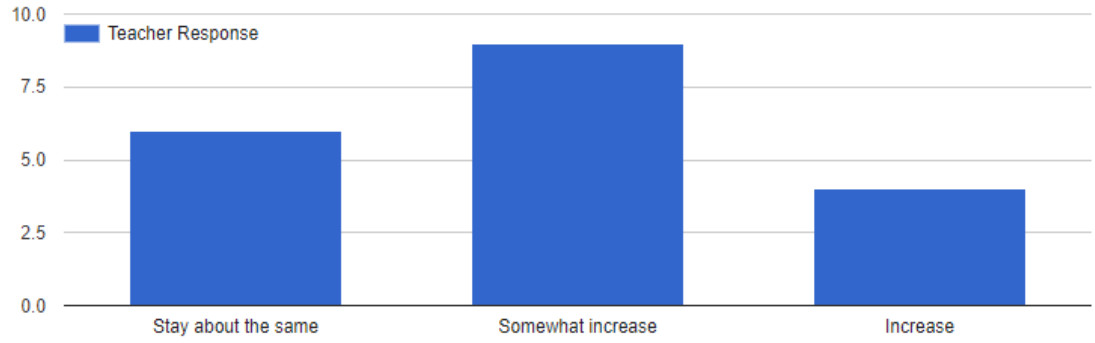

Figure H.6 Teacher Survey Question 6

After Students Were Taught a Lesson on Time Management…Their Time Management Skills…

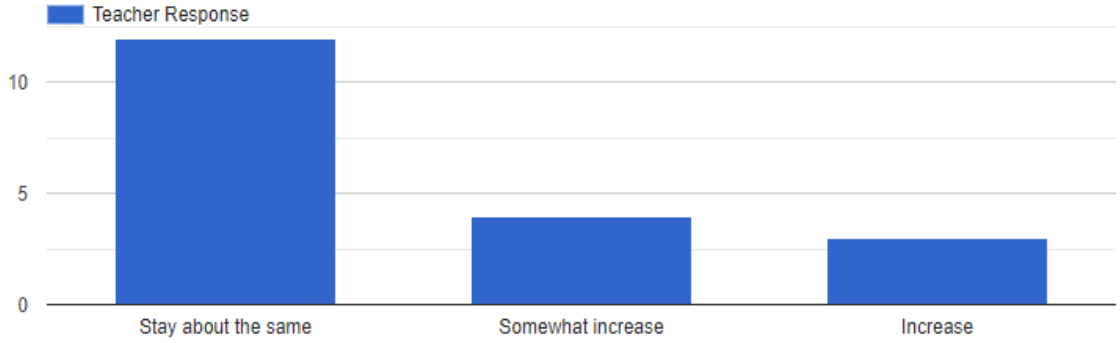

Figure H.7 Teacher Survey Question 7

How Often Did Student's Attend FLEX

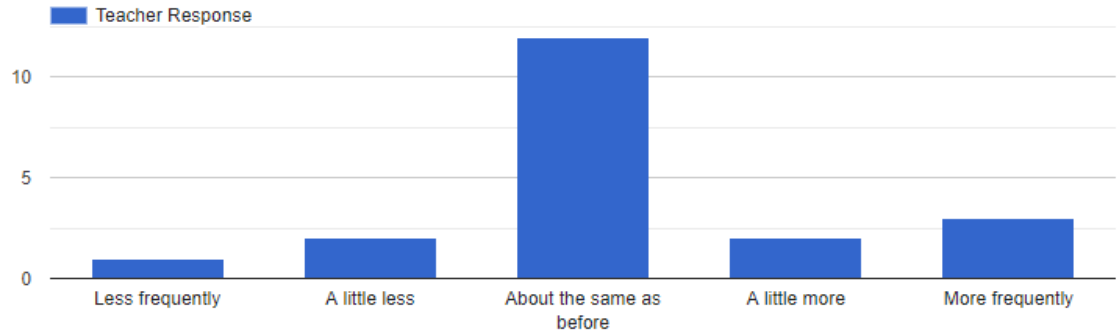

Figure H.8 Teacher Survey Question 8